THE ® saint

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IN THIS ISSUE

MICHAEL INNES

ANDREW GARVE

PHILIP MacDONALD

GEORGE HARMON COXE

LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Whispering Knights

A New Story by AUGUST DERLETH

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

The main reason why I have steadfastly refused to become a movie star is not that I doubt my acting ability, because plenty of joes have got their names on the marquees without that, but the fact that I really hate to be photographed. I never travel without a camera, and enjoy subjecting my friends to the ordeal, but my notorious good nature easily curdles at being pushed to the other side of the lens. Whether this is a defensive survival from the days when I had planned for myself a triumphant career in crime, from which I was drearily sidetracked by having to spend too much time writing about it in order to acquire what I thought was the essential capital, is a question that I must leave the amateur analysts to argue.

The same picture of me has therefore appeared on this inside cover since the very second issue of this Magazine (the first was put out with no portrait at all, probably in the hope of not scaring away any sensitive buyers) except for a period when we tried out a contribution by Arthur Knight, a talented young amateur aiming to be a professional, which my wife complained looked too much like the Real Me to scare my public with. As a souvenir of the last time I was professionally roped and mugged, I was well enough satisfied with the first picture for ten years, and would have been happy to coast on it for another ten.

However, last summer in London I was lured after hours into the studio of a friend of ours, Michael Williams, who just happens to be in the international top rank of fashion photographers, on the sneaky pretext of taking a picture of my wife, who is worth taking pictures of. This subtly led to some pictures of us two together, and thence to another devious maneuver which left me all alone before the evil eye.

The result is brought to you herewith, in living black-and-white.

You need not study it in a hurry, because it will probably remind you that any resemblance between myself and the beautiful women that Michael Williams usually photographs is purely coincidental, and that I am not trying to hit any fashion list of the world's best-dressed men.

It may well be asked, in the circumstances (I am so pedantic that I shall go to the gallows refusing to be *UNDER* circumstances, which my painful schooling in Latin taught me can only be *AROUND*) why I should want my picture to appear here at all. A fair challenge, which I can only meet by admitting an anomaly.

Movie fans send studios millions of requests for pictures of movie stars, whose likenesses should already be indelibly printed on their eyeballs. Hardly any readers (who reads?) care what an author looks like. But it would be nice, just once, to walk into a strange restaurant, and have a new obsequious head waiter bustle up and say: "How nice to see you, Mr. Hornung."

THE
saint
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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the angel's eye

by Leslie Charteris

THE HOLLANDIA is one of the best hotels in Amsterdam. The best hotels everywhere exercise a proper discretion over the guests whom they admit to their distinguished accommodations. The clerk at the Hollandia read the name that Simon Templar had filled in on the form in front of him, and his brow wrinkled as he looked up.

"Mr. Templar," he said. "Are you by any chance the Saint?"

Simon sighed imperceptibly. He knew that look. As a man who had rather a weakness for the best hotels, it was sometimes a little tiresome to him.

"You guessed it," he said.

"I do not know if we have a room that would suit you."

"I'm not too hard to please."

"Excuse me," said the clerk.

He retired to an inner office. In a few minutes he came back, accompanied by an older and more authoritative personage.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Templar," said the personage cordially. "I am the manager. It is nice of you to come to us. But you do not have a reservation."

"No," said the Saint patiently "But I wasn't expecting any

IT WAS A JEWEL WHOSE SIZE AND BRILLIANCE MIGHT HAVE AWAKENED AVARICE IN AN ANGEL—OR EVEN IN A PROPERLY HALOED SAINT.

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trouble. I'm still not expecting any. Not any at all. I'm on vacation."

"Of course."

"As a matter of fact, I only came this way to say hullo to an old friend of mine, one of your eminent citizens. You probably know him—Pieter Liefman. He makes some of the best beer in these parts. But he's out of town, and won't be back till to-morrow or the next day. I just want to wait over and see him."

"You are a friend of Mr. Liefman?"

"We are what you might call brothers under the suds."

The manager studied him frankly for a while, and found it hard to see anything that threatened the peace and good name of the hotel. The Saint wore his clothes with the careless ease of a man accustomed to the best of everything, and with the confidence of one who did not have to think twice about paying for it. And at that moment the keen corsair's face was in repose, and the imps of devilment stilled in the clear blue eyes—it was a trick of camouflage that sometimes served the Saint better than a disguise, and on those occasions almost made him seem to fit his incongruous nickname.

"I think we can find you a room," said the manager.

So that minor problem was overcome, but not without starting a slight stir of curiosity that spread like an active virus through all levels of the human beings within the hotel, who were, after all, only human. Simon knew it when he came downstairs again after a shower and a change, by the studiously veiled interest of the staff, the elaborately impersonal glances and politely inaudible whisperings of the other guests in the lobby. The years had given him an extra-sensory perception of the subtle symptoms of recognition; but in the same time he had developed a protective tolerance for it. Let the speculations buzz: they could not embarrass him when he had nothing to hide.

For what he had told the manager was the simple truth. He had made the detour to Amsterdam in the course of an already aimless European vacation for no reason but the impulse to renew an old acquaintance and sample the products of the famous Liefman *brouwerei* at the source, and he had no thought of avenging any iniquities, robbing any robbers, or doing any of the other entertaining and lawless things which had made his name a nightmare to the police of four continents and given him the reputation which caused even tourists to stare furtively from behind their guidebooks.

That this peaceful project was to be short-lived was not his fault—he himself would have

added, with a perfectly straight face, "as usual."

He dined at the Lido, on a *rijstafel* of heroic conception—the taste for, and the art of preparing, a true Indonesian curry being one of the few legacies left to the Netherlands from their former East Indian empire—and it was not until his appetite was on the verge of admitting defeat that he had time to become aware that he was the object of more than ordinary attention from a table across the room.

There were two people at it, a middle-aged couple whose accents, as he had unconsciously overheard them speaking to the waiter, identified them as English, and whose clothes had a dull neatness that was worn like a proud *insigne* of respectability. The man had a square shape, with thinning hair, rimless spectacles, and a face moulded in the lines of stolid responsibility. The woman was plump and motherly, and looked as if she would be equally at home in a kitchen or a church bazaar. They looked most obviously like a senior employee of a prosperous business house, who had worked his way up from the bottom during a lifetime of loyal service, and his competent and comfortable wife. The only untypical thing about them was that instead of eating in the bored or companionable silence normally practised by such couples, they had been talking busily throughout the meal in low voices of which not a sound had reached the Saint's sensitive ears – except, as has been said, when they spoke to the waiter. Simon Templar, whose favourite study was the mechanism of his fellow creatures, had begun to theorise about what gave them so much material for conversation, as approaching satiety released his interest from food. It was not, he concluded, an affair of connubial recriminations, which might typically have disrupted a typical taciturnity; and yet the conversation did not seem to be made up of pleasant trivialities, for the man's air of permanent anxiety deepened as it went on, and once or twice he ran a hand over his sparse hair in a gesture almost of desperation.

It was about the same time that Simon realised, from the frequent glances in his direction, that he was somehow being made a major factor in the discussion.

He gazed out of the window at the twinkling lights reflected in the ornamental lakes of the Vondel Park and hoped that his impression was mistaken, or that they would soon find something else to argue about.

A voice at his elbow said: "Excuse me, Mr. Templar—you *are* the Saint, aren't you?"

He turned resignedly. It was the woman, of course.

"I suppose somebody told you at the Hollandia," he said. "But they should have told you not to worry. I've promised not to murder anyone or steal their jewels while I'm here."

"My name's Upwater," she said. "And I did want to talk to you about jewels. But not about your stealing them. I've heard that you're really a good man, and you help people in trouble, and we're in terrible trouble. I told my husband it seemed like Providence your being here, just when this awful thing has happened. I said, 'The Saint's the only person who might be able to help us,' and he said, 'Why should you bother?' and we had quite an argument, but I had to speak to you anyway. At least you'll listen, won't you? May I call him over?"

She had already dumped herself in a vacant chair, and the Saint did not see any way short of outright churlishness to dislodge her. In the mellow aftermath of a good meal, such violent measures were unthinkable. And he had nothing else in particular to do. That was so often what got him into things. . . .

He grinned philosophically and nodded.

"What's the matter with these jewels?" he inquired.

She turned and beckoned to her husband, who started to get up from the table, looking more worried than ever.

"As a matter of fact," she said, it's only one jewel. A diamond."

"Oh."

"We've lost it. And it doesn't belong to us."

"That could be embarrassing," Simon admitted. But why should I know where to look for it?"

"It's been stolen."

"Not by me."

"This is a perfect blue stone," said Mr. Upwater, sitting down heavily, "as big as the Hope diamond. It's worth half a million dollars in your money."

"I work for a very exclusive firm of jewellers in Bond Street in London," Mr. Upwater explained in a ponderous and painstaking way. I've been with them myself for thirty years. The stone belongs to one of our clients. It is a magnificent gem, with a rather romantic name—the Angel's Eye. But being an old stone, it isn't too well cut. Our client decided to have it recut, which would improve its appearance and even enhance its value. As the oldest employee of the firm, it was entrusted to me to bring it here, to one of the best cutters in Amsterdam, to have the work done."

"And somebody swiped it from you on the way?" Simon hazarded.

"Oh, no. I delivered it to the cutter, Hendrik Jonkheer, yesterday. Today I went back to watch the start of the cutting.

Mrs. Upwater went with me. I'd brought her along for a little holiday. And—tell Mr. Templar what happened, Mabel."

"Mr. Jonkheer looked Mr. Upwater straight in the eye," said Mrs. Upwater, "and told him he'd never seen him before and he certainly hadn't brought him any diamond."

Something like a phantom feather trailed up the Saint's spine, riffling his skin with a ghostly goose-pimples. And on the heels of that psychic chill came a warm, pervasive glow of utter beatitude that crowned his recent feast more perfectly than the coffee and Napoleon brandy, which he had not yet touched, would ever do. His interest was no longer polite or even perfunctory. It had the vast receptive serenity of a cathedral.

For just as a musician would be electrified by a cadence of divine harmonies, so could the Saint respond to the tones of new and fabulous adventure. And about this one, he knew, there could be nothing commonplace. Suddenly he was humbly grateful for his ambiguous reputation, for the little difficulty at the hotel, for the resultant gossip, for the extravagant bonus which it had brought him. Because in a few simple unmistakable words the prosaic Mr. and Mrs. Upwater had placed in his hands the string to a kite of such superlatively crooked design that its flight, wherever it led, could bring only joy to his perversely artistic soul — a swindle of such originality, and impudence that he contemplated it with an emotion bordering upon awe.

"That," said the Saint at length, with transcendent understatement after so long a pause, "is a lulu."

"I can't get used to it yet," Mr. Upwater said dazedly. "He stood there, Mr. Jonkheer did, looking straight at me just like I'm looking at you, only as if he thought I was a lunatic, and said he'd never set eyes on me before in his life. He almost had me believing I'd gone out of my mind. Only I knew I hadn't."

"It's just like that story," Mrs. Upwater said. "You must know the one. About the girl and her mother who go to a hotel in Paris, and the mother's sick, so the daughter goes out to get her some medicine, and when she gets back everybody in the hotel says they've never seen her before, or her mother, and when she goes to the room where she left her mother it's a different room, and there's nobody there."

Simon nodded, almost in a trance himself.

"I know the story," he said. "It turns out that the mother had the plague, or something, doesn't it? And they got rid of her and tried to cover it up because they didn't want to scare

away the tourists. . . . But this is a new twist!"

"That it is," said Mr. Upwater gloomily. "Only diamonds don't get any disease. But they're worth a lot of money."

At last the Saint was able to control the palpitating gremlins inside him enough to reach for a cigarette.

"You're sure you went to the right place?" he asked.

"I couldn't go wrong. The name's on the door."

"And you're sure it was Jonkheer you saw?"

"Of course I'm sure. It was the same man both times. The police knew him, too."

"You've been to the police already?"

"Of course I have. First thing I did when I saw I wasn't getting anywhere with Jonkheer. They went with me to the shop. But it was his word against mine, and they preferred his. Said he was a well-known respectable citizen, but they didn't know the same about me. I almost got locked up myself. They as good as said I was either off my nut or trying to blackmail him."

"Didn't anyone else see you give him the stone?"

"No. It was just him and me. I didn't take Mrs. Upwater with me yesterday—she wanted to stay at the hotel and do our unpacking."

"But if you say you gave it to him, Tom," said Mrs. Upwater loyally, "I know you did."

Simon picked up his balloon glass and rolled the golden liquid around in it.

"Didn't you get a receipt or anything?"

"Indeed I did. But this Dutchman swears it isn't even in his writing."

"Could anyone else have disguised himself as Jonkheer?"

"If you saw him, Mr. Templar, you'd know that couldn't be done, except in a story."

"How about a black-sheep twin brother?"

"I thought of that, too," Mr. Upwater said dourly. "I'm not a fool, and I've read books. He just doesn't have one. The police vouch for that."

The Saint sipped his cognac reverently. Everything was getting better and better.

"And you would have vouched for Jonkheer."

"I never met him before," Mr. Upwater said carefully, 'but I've known about him for years. Everyone knows him in the trade."

"So you've no idea what would turn a man like that into a thief?"

Mr. Upwater moved his hands hopelessly.

"Who knows what makes anyone go wrong? They say that every man has his price, so I suppose every man can be tempted. And that stone was big

enough to tempt anyone."

"Then," said the Saint, "the same could be said about you."

"That's what he's afraid of," Mrs. Upwater said gently.

Simon sniffed his brandy again, watching the man.

"What does your firm think about it?"

"I haven't told them yet," Upwater said dully. "I haven't had the courage. You see——"

"You see," Mrs. Upwater put in, and her voice began to break, "they know Mr. Jonkheer, too. They've done business with him for a long time. My husband's been with them for a long time, too, but he's only an employee. *Someone's* got to be guilty. . . . They can't *prove* that Tom's lying, because he isn't; but that's not enough. If he can't prove absolutely that he's telling the truth——"

"There'd always be a doubt," her husband finished for her. "And with a firm like I work for, in that kind of business, that's the end. They'd let me out, and I'd never get another job. I might as well put my head in a gas-oven, or jump in one of these canals."

He pulled off his spectacles abruptly and put a trembling hand over his eyes.

Mrs. Upwater patted his shoulder as if he had been a little boy.

"There, there," she said meaninglessly, and looked, at the Saint with tears in her eyes. "Mr. Templar, you're the only man in the world who might be able to do something about a thing like this. You *must* help us!"

She really didn't have to plead. For Simon Templar to have walked away from a story like that would have been as improbable a phenomenon as a terrier ignoring the presence of a rat waltzing under his nose. There were people who thought that the Saint was a cold-blooded nemesis of crime; but altogether, aside from the irresistible abstract beauty of the situation that the Upwaters had set before him, he felt genuinely sorry for them.

His human sympathy, however, detracted nothing from the delight with which he viewed the immediate future. It was true that only a few hours ago he promised to be good; but there were limits. His evening, and in fact his whole visit to Amsterdam, was made.

He signalled to a waiter.

"I think we should all have a drink on this," he said.

The half-conscious joy in Mrs. Upwater's tear-dimmed eyes, to anyone else, would have been enough reward.

"You will help us?" she said breathlessly.

"There's nothing I can do tonight. So we might as well just celebrate. But tomorrow," Sim-

on promised, "I will pay a call on your Mr. Jonkheer."

The name was on the door, as Mr. Upwater had said, of a narrow-fronted three-storied brick building in a narrow street of similar buildings behind the Rijksmuseum: HENDRICK JONKHEER, and in smaller letters under it, *Diamantslijter*. From the weathered stone of the doorstep to the weathered tile of the peaked roof the house had a solid air of permanence and tradition. The only feature that distinguished it from its equally solid neighbours was the prison-like arrangement of iron bars over the two muslin-curtained ground floor windows. Definitely it bore no stigma of a potentially flashy or fly-by-night operation.

Simon tugged at the oldfashioned bell-pull, and heard it clang somewhere in the depths of the building. Presently the door opened, no more than a foot, to the limit of a chain fastened inside, and a thin young man in a knee-length grey overall coat looked out.

"May I see Mr. Jonkheer?" Simon said.

"Your business, sir?"

"I'm a magazine writer, doing an article on the diamond business. I thought a man of Mr. Jonkheer's standing could give me some valuable information.

The young man unfastened the chain and let him in to a bare narrow hall. There were doors on one side and another at the back, and a flight of uncarpeted wooden stairs led upwards. On a hard chair beside the stairs, with a newspaper on his lap and one hand under the paper, sat a burly man with blond close-cropped hair who stared at the Saint woodenly.

"One moment, please," said the young man.

He disappeared through the door at the end of the hall. The burly man continued to stare motionlessly at the Saint, as if he were stuffed. In a little while the young man came back.

"This way, please."

The back room was a homely sort of office, the only possible sanctum of an individualistic old-world craftsman who needed no front for his skill. It contained an ancient roll-top desk with dusty papers overflowing from its pigeon-holes and littered over its surfaces, a battered swivel chair at the desk, and two overstuffed arm-chairs whose leather upholstery was dark and shiny with age. There were china figures and family photographs in gilt frames on the marble mantelpiece over a black iron coal fireplace. The safe stood under another barred window; and massive though it was, it would not have offered much more resistance than a matchbox to a modern cracksman.

Mr. Jonkheer was a short bald man in his shirt-sleeves, with a wide paunch under a leather apron and a wide multiple-chinned face. It was obvious at a glance that no make-up virtuoso could have duplicated him. His pale blue eyes looked small and bright behind thick gold-rimmed glasses.

"You are a writer, eh?" he said, with a kind of gruff affabitity. "Which magazine do you write for?"

"Any one that'll buy what I write."

"So. And what can I tell you for your article?"

The Saint sat in one of the heavy-arm chairs and opened a pack of cigarettes.

"Well, anything interesting about your work," he said.

"I cut jewels—principally diamonds."

"I know. I'm told you're one of the best cutters in the business."

"There are many good ones. I am good."

"I suppose you've been doing it all your life?"

"Since I am an apprentice, at sixteen. I have been cutting stones, now for forty years."

"You must have cut some famous jewels in that time."

A twin pair of vertical lines began to pucker between the cutter's bushy brows.

"Famous?"

"I mean, well-known jewels, that people would like to read about."

"I have cut many good stones."

This was manifestly going to make no revelationary progress. Simon said, as off-handedly as he could: "You're too modest, Mr. Jonkheer. For instance, how about the Angel's Eye?"

There was no audible sound effect like a sickening thud, but the response was much the same. In a silence that fairly hummed with hollowness, the diamond cutter's small bright eyes hardened and froze like drops of his own gems.

The Saint exhaled cigarette smoke and tried to appear as if he noticed nothing out of the ordinary. At last Jonkheer said: "What about the Angel's Eye?"

"You know the stone I mean?"

"Of course. It is a famous diamond."

"How are you going to re-cut it?"

"I am not re-cutting it."

Jonkheer's tone was still gruff, but no longer affable. Simon looked puzzled.

"But you have it here."

"I do not."

"I was told——"

"You are mistaken."

"I don't get it," said the Saint, with an ingenuous frown. "The fellow who referred me to you said positively that the Angel's Eye was brought to you for re-cutting only the other day. I

don't mean to pry into your business, but——"

The other's steady stare was cold with suspicion.

"Who was this person?"

"It was somebody in the trade. I don't know that I ought to mention his name. But he was very definite."

Jonkheer gazed at him for a longer time, with no increase in friendliness. Then he turned his head slightly and called: "*Zuilen, kom toch binnen!*"

The burly blond man who had been sitting out in the hall walked in instantly, and without any preliminary sound, so that Simon realised that the door of the little office had never been fully closed and the big man must have been standing directly outside it. He brought his newspaper with him, carrying it rather awkwardly, as if he had something underneath it. With his left hand, he took a small leather folder from his pocket and showed Simon the card in it. The card carried his photograph and an inscription which Simon did not have time to read, but he recognised the official-looking seal and the word *Politie*.

The big man, whose name was evidently Zuilen, was a very polite *politie*.

"May I see your credentials, please?"

"My passport is at the hotel," said the Saint.

"Something, perhaps, from the magazine you write for?"

"I don't write for any particular magazine. I just peddle my stuff wherever I can."

"You must have something on you, some evidence of identity," said the blond man patiently. "Please."

He did not openly suggest that if none were produced the matter could be continued at headquarters. That would have been superfluous.

Simon produced his wallet, and watched interestedly while Zuilen glanced at the contents. The detective's eyes snapped from the first card that caught them to the Saint's face as if a switch had been flicked, but his manner remained painstakingly correct.

"Mr. Templar," he said, "I did not hear that you were a writer."

"It's a new racket," said the Saint easily.

The blond man handed the wallet back.

"You would do well to search for your material somewhere else," he said. "There is nothing to interest you here."

"Now wait a minute," Simon argued. "I'm not making any trouble. I was told on the best authority that Mr. Jonkheer had received a diamond called the Angel's Eye to re-cut. I simply asked him about it. That isn't a crime."

"I am glad there is no crime,"

does not have any such dia- said the burly man stolidly "We do not like to have crime from foreigners, especially during the tourist season. Mr. Jonkheer mond. Also he does not wish to be bothered. It is better that you do not make any trouble." He held the door firmly open. "Good-day, Mr. Templar."

A few moments later, without a harsh word having been spoken or an overt threat having been uttered, the Saint found himself indisputably out on the pavement blinking at the noonday sunshine and listening to the rattle of chain and bolts being refastened on the inside of the old oak door.

"It was a lovely job," Simon told the Upwaters. "I never had a chance of getting to first base."

They sat around a lunch table in one of the crypt-like rooms of the Vijf Vliegen, that quaintly labyrinthine restaurant on the Spuistraat, where they had arranged to meet; although only the Saint seemed to have much appetite for the excellent *kalfoesters,* thin fillets of veal browned in butter and lemon juice, with stewed cucumbers and brown beans, which he had ordered for what he considered fairly earned nutriment.

"That policeman, too," said Mrs. Upwater indignantly. "That Jonkheer really must have the wool pulled over their eyes."

"Or else they're all in the swindle up to the neck with him," Mr. Upwater said bitterly.

"However it goes," said the Saint, "the place is pretty well guarded. And I haven't the faintest doubt that the Angel's Eye is there. They were so grimly determined to deny it. I could see it gave Jonkheer a good jolt when I asked about it. I bet they're still worrying about what my angle is, if that's any help to you."

"It's there, all right," Upwater said gloomily. "Did you see his safe?"

"Oh, yes. In his office."

"I didn't see it. I was taken right into his workshop the first time, and the second time I didn't get any further than the hall. If I'd seen the safe, I might have been able to have the policeman make him open it."

"His office is on the ground floor, at the back of the hall."

"The diamond probably isn't there now, anyway," said Mrs. Upwater.

Simon took a deep pull at his beer.

"How big is this diamond?" he asked. "You said it was as big as the Hope. How big is that?"

"About a hundred carats," Upwater said. He put the tips of his thumb and forefinger together, forming a circle. "About so big. It'd be easy to hide anywhere."

Simon forked together the last remnants of food on his plate, and ate them with infinite enjoyment. Any lingering doubts that he might have had were gone. He knew that this was going to be an adventure to remember.

"I told you, I'm certain the Angel's Eye is at Jonkheer's," he said. "That's why the cop is staying on the premises. But I don't think it's hidden. I think they figure it's well enough guarded. And an old-fashioned conservative type like Jonkheer would have complete confidence in an old-fashioned safe like that, just because it weighs a few tons and he's had it ever since he went into business. He wouldn't believe that any up-to-date expert could go through it like a coffee-can."

The man and woman gazed at him uncertainly.

"What good does that do us?" Mr. Upwater asked at length. "I'm no safe-cracker."

"But I am," said the Saint.

There was another long and pent-up silence.

"You'd *burgle* it?" Mrs. Upwater said.

"I think you knew all along," said the Saint gently, "that I would."

Mrs. Upwater began to cry.

"You can't do that," Mr. Upwater protested. "That's robbery!"

"To take back your own property?"

"But if you got caught——"

"If I only take the Angel's Eye, which Jonkheer isn't supposed to have anyway, how is he going to phrase his squawk?"

Mr. Upwater clutched his wife's hand, staring at the Saint with a pathetic sort of devotion.

"I never thought I'd find myself siding with anyone about breaking the law," he said. "But you're right, Mr. Templar—Jonkheer's got us by the short hairs, and the only way we can ever get even is to steal the diamond back, just about the same way that he got it. Only I could never 've thought of it myself, and it beats me why you'd take a chance like that to help a total stranger."

Simon lighted a cigarette.

"Well," he said, and his smile was happily mephistophelean, "suppose I did just happen to take something else besides your diamond—by the way of interest, you might say—would you feel it was your duty to tell the olice about me?"

"*I* wouldn't," said Mrs. Upwater promptly, dabbing her eyes. "A man like Jonkheer deserves to lose everything he's got."

"Then that's settled," said the Saint cheerfully. "How about dessert? Some *oliebollen*? Or the *flensjes* should be mildly sensational."

Mr. Upwater shook his head. He was still staring at the Saint much as a lost explorer in the Sahara would have stared at the approach of an ice wagon.

"I'm too nervous to eat," he said. "I'll be in a sweat until this is over. When will you do it?"

"On the stroke of midnight," said the Saint. "I'm superstitious about the witching hour—it's always been lucky for me. Besides, by that time our friend Jonkheer will be sound asleep, and even the police guard will be drowsy. I'm pretty sure Jonkheer lives over the shop and he's the type who would go to bed about ten."

"Isn't there anything I can do, Mr. Templar? I wouldn't be much of a hand at what you're planning, but——"

"Not a thing. Take Mrs. Upwater sightseeing. Have dinner. Go to your room, break out some cards, and send for a bottle of schnapps. When the waiter brings it, make like I've gone to the bathroom. If anything goes wrong, you'll be my alibi—we were all playing cards. I'll see you soon after midnight, with your diamond." Simon looked at his watch. "Now, if you're through, I'll run along. I've got to shop for a few things I don't normally carry in my luggage."

He spent an interesting afternoon in his own way, and got back to the Hollandia about six o'clock with no particular plans for the early part of the evening. But that state of tranquil vagueness lasted only until he turned away from the desk with his key. Then a hand smacked him violently between the shoulder-blades, and he turned again to meet the merry dark horn-spectacled eyes of a slight young man who looked more like a New Yorker than any New Yorker would have done.

"Simon, you old son-of-a-gun!" cried Pieter Liefman. "What schemozzle are you up to here?"

The scion of Amsterdam's most traditionalistic brewery had spent some years in the United States, and prided himself on his complete assimilation of the culture of the New World.

"Pete!" The Saint grinned. "You couldn't have shown up at a better moment."

"I've been out in the sticks," Liefman said. "I just got back in town and got your message, and I came right over to try and track you down. What's boiling?"

"Let's get a drink somewhere and I'll tell you."

"My hot-shot's outside. We can drive out to Scherpenzeel, to the De Witte."

"Good enough. The way you drive, you can get me back in plenty of time for what I want to do later."

As Pieter Liefman needled his

Jaguar through the sparse evening traffic with an ebullient disregard for all speed laws and principles of safety that would have had most passengers gripping the seat and muttering despondent prayers, Simon Templar leaned back with a cigarette and reflected gratefully on his good fortune. Pieter's timely arrival had made his project even neater than he had hoped.

"I guess you rate pretty high in this town, Pete," he remarked.

"If you mean I should get a ducat for speeding, you don't know the quarter of it. They throw the books at me about once a week."

"But in any serious case, I imagine you'd be as influential a witness as any guy could want."

"Quit holding up on me," Liefman implored. "Is the Saint on the war-paint again?"

Simon began his tale at the beginning.

The return from Scherpenzeel, after a gargantuan repast devoured with respectful deliberation, was made at the same suicidal velocity, but so coolly timed that clocks were booming the hour that Simon had fixed in his mind as the Jaguar purred to a stop in the street where Hendrik Jonkheer plied his trade, but several doors away from the house itself. The short street was deserted except for one other car parked at the opposite end.

"I only hope you've figured this on the button," Pieter Liefman said.

"I am the world's greatest practical psychologist," said the Saint. "Go ahead with your part of the act."

He slipped out of the car and strolled unhurriedly down the street to Jonkheer's door. The building was dark and wrapped in silence. He turned the door handle experimentally. The door started to yawn at his touch, and no inside chain stopped it.

Simon stepped in, closing it swiftly and silently behind him. With a pencil flashlight smothered in his hand so that the bulb was almost covered by his fingers, he let a dim glow play momentarily over the inside of the frame. The chain was dangling, the hasp at one end still attached to it with fragments of freshly torn wood adhering to the screws, testifying to the inherent weakness of such devices which was no surprise to him.

He turned the same hardly more than phosphorescent illumination around the hall, and at the foot of the stairs he saw the burly blond guard, Zuilen, lying on the floor, his wrists and ankles expertly bound and tied together and his mouth covered with adhesive tape. The big policeman seemed uninjured, ex-

cept probably in his dignity, to judge by the lively glare of wrath that smouldered in his eyes.

Simon went past him without pausing for any social amenities, moving with the fluid soundlessness of a disembodied shadow.

The door of the back office was ajar, outlined with the faint luminosity of a well-shaded light within. Simon pushed it with his fingertips, and it swung wider without even an uncooperative creak.

Inside, he saw that the light came from a small professionally shrouded electric lantern on the floor beside the massive safe. The safe was open, and the means of its opening were evident in an assortment of shining tools spread on a velvet cloth in front of it.

Between Simon and the safe stood a man with a large handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat, obviously serving as an easily replaceable mask, who was in the act of stuffing a handful of small tissue-paper packages into his pocket.

"Good evening," said the Saint, because it seemed as tactful a way of drawing attention to himself as he could think of.

He said it very quietly, too, in case his audience had a weak heart, but just the same the man spun around like a puppet jerked with a string.

The movement stopped there, because Simon was playing the beam of his flashlight pointedly on the gun in his right hand, to discourage any additional reaction. But there was enough general luminance, between that and the shielded lamp on the floor, for each of them to see the other's face.

Mr. Upwater stared at him pallidly, and licked his lips.

"You weren't supposed to be here for an hour," he said stupidly.

"That's what I told you," said the Saint calmly, "so that I'd know about what time you'd be here. Naturally you wanted to have comfortable time to do the job before I arrived, but you wouldn't want to be too long before, in case it was discovered too soon for me to walk in and take the rap. You did the groundwork very cleverly—getting me to come here this morning and case the joint for you, while at the same time establishing myself as a prime suspect. The only thing I was a little worried about was whether you meant to really let me do the job myself, and hijack the boodle afterwards. But I decided you wouldn't take that big a chance—you couldn't be quite sure that with so much loot in my pockets I mightn't yield to temptation and double-cross you. When you said yourself that every man has his price, you gave me a fix on your thinking."

Mr. Upwater's eyes were wild and haggard.

"You've got it all wrong," he said feverishly. "I was afraid you were just kidding me—that you wouldn't really do it at all—so I made up my mind to do it myself."

"And not like any amateur, either," said the Saint approvingly. "Those tools of yours are first class. I suppose you wouldn't like to tell me how you got wind of the Angel's Eye being re-cut here? They were certainly doing their best to keep it quiet, to try and avoid having any trouble with people like us, as I could tell by the reception I got when I started to ask questions. It was nice work of yours to locate it; but you must have thought you were really in luck when you heard I was in town, all ready to be the fall guy."

"So help me, Mr. Templar, I told you the truth——"

"Oh, no, you didn't. Not from the word Go. I knew you were lying from the moment you said you delivered the Angel's Eye the day before yesterday and the cutting was supposed to start yesterday. Anyone who knows anything about diamonds knows that a cutter would study an important stone like that for weeks, maybe even months, before he made the first cut, because if he made any mistake about the grain he might break it into a lot of worthless fragments. And I was doubly sure that you didn't work for any big-time jewellers when you said that the Angel's Eye was as big as the Hope Diamond and weighed about a hundred carats. For your information, the Hope diamond, good as it is, is only forty-four and a quarter. It's my business to know things like that, and it ought to be yours."

Upwater swallowed.

"Can't we call it quits?" he said desperately. "There's plenty for both of us."

"Thank you," said the Saint, "but this time I'll be happy to collect a legitimate reward, with no headaches."

"Nobody'll believe you," Upwater said viciously. "I'll say you were in it with me, right up to now."

"I'm sorry," said the Saint, "but I've taken care to prove otherwise."

There was a sudden rush of feet, and the lights went on. Two uniformed men stood in the doorway, with Pieter Liefman crowding in past them. Pieter put an arm round the Saint's shoulders and spoke rapidly to the policemen in Dutch, and Upwater wilted as he realised that the trap was closed.

Some time later, as they all went out into the street, with Upwater handcuffed between the two officers, Simon looked for the car that had been parked

on the far corner. It was no longer there.

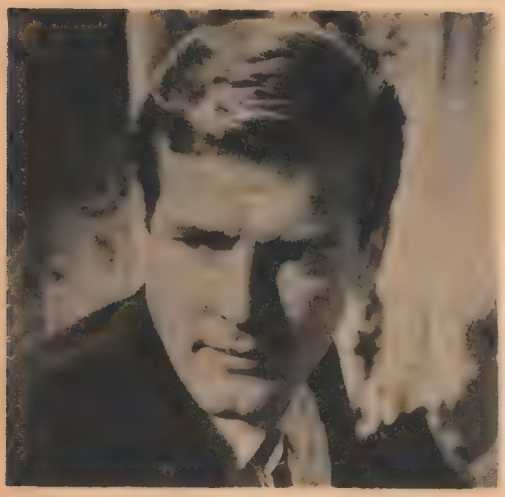
Pieter intercepted the glance.

"It took off when I came back with the flatfeet," he said.

Simon read the mute entreaty in Upwater's white face, and shrugged.

"Okay," he said. "We won't say anything about Mabel. After all, she was the one who really brought me into this."

On second thoughts after he saw Mr. Upwater's next expression, he wondered if that was quite the right thing to mention.



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adventure of the whispering knights

by August Derleth

"THE SCIENCE of deduction," observed my friend, Solar Pons, "may at one and the same time be the most skillful kind of rationalization, and the most arrant guesswork. Would it surprise you very much, Parker, if I were to tell you that despite all our preparations, we are not likely after all to be partaking of Mrs. Johnson's admirable fare this noon?"

We were standing on the station platform in Chipping Norton, waiting upon the eight o'clock train for Paddington. Pons had completed work on the curious case of the Cottys Fleece too late the preceding night for the last train to London, and we were now off with the morning's first train.

"Nothing you said or did would surprise me very much," I said. 'But since that's our train bearing down upon us, I fear, for once, you're over-reaching yourself."

"One ought not to draw conclusions until one is in possession of all the available facts," said Pons, his eyes dancing. "Look there!" He gestured behind me.

More than twelve years ago Clayton Rawson wrote in the UNICORN MYSTERY BOOK CLUB NEWS how he didn't know "just where to begin trying to tell you about August Derleth. We have a dark suspicion that he has discovered his own private method of putting atomic energy to work at the business of writing." One can still say this about the widely respected author of these Sola Pons stories and many other books, who lives and works in Sauk City, Wisconsin.

I turned. There, bearing down upon the station as furiously as he could paddle his bicycle, was a police constable.

"I fancy my presence in Chipping Norton was not a well kept secret," said Pons dryly.

The village glowed in the morning sun, which lay mellowly on its old stone buildings. Sunlight gleamed from the mullioned windows of the guildhall and the dormers of the almshouses as well as the glass and stone of the fifteenth-century clerestory of the church that dominated the center of Chipping Norton.

"It's hardly a morning for crime," I said.

"Ah, crime knows no season. You see, he has seen us."

The constable arrived at the same time from one direction as the train came from the other. Dismounting, he started toward us on the run.

"Sir!" he cried when he came within speaking distance. "I believe you are Mr. Solar Pons?"

"What can I do for you, Constable?" asked Pont.

"I would appreciate your advice on a matter that has come up."

He had now come abreast of us, and stood, a little breathless, trying to compose himself—a young fellow of not more than thirty, with firm clear blue eyes, and a very high flush in his thin cheeks. He had a long face, faintly equine in appearance, and wore a sparse moustache that complemented his equally sparse eyebrows and the sandy hair that could be seen below his helmet.

"Ruskin, sir," he said. That's my name."

"And what is the problem, Constable?"

"I'm afraid it's murder."

Pons looked speculatively at me. "Parker, you have the choice between the train or another of those little adventures you seem to dote upon. Which shall it be?"

"Your choice is mine," I said.

"Capital!"

"Could we step off to the side, sir?" asked Ruskin anxiously. "We ought not to attract too much attention."

Passengers were leaving and entering their compartments.

We moved away from the train to the wall of the station. Constable Ruskin had now recovered his breath and his composure, but none of his anxiety had drained out of his face. He lowered his voice and spoke urgently.

"Sir, do you know the cromlech along the Birmingham Road?" he asked.

"Called variously the Rollright or Rollrich Stones," said Pons. "Presumed Drudic in origin, but not one of the more important cromlechs in England."

"Yes, sir, that's right," said Ruskin, nodding. "Not many people visit the stones, that's true. But it *is* under the care of His Majesty's Office of Works, sir, and there's a caretaker. Well, Mr. Pons, about a hundred yards to the east of the circle is a rather large megalithic burial chamber. We know it hereabouts as the Whispering Knights. This morning two young American gentlemen, studying at Oxford on some sort of scholarship, I understand, were examining the area and came upon what they took to be a mound of feathers and strips of cloth in the chamber. It proved to be the body of an elderly gentleman wearing a mummer's costume. They reported it to the caretaker, who called me. Certain features of the crime impelled me to ask your assistance."

"For instance?" asked Pons.

"Well, sir—it's summer," said the constable earnestly. "The Mummers' Play is put on at Christmas. But not now."

"Ah, mummers still perform hereabouts, Constable?"

"Yes, sir. In many places here In Oxfordshire — Waterstock, near Thame — Cuddlesdon, Leafield, Heyford, Shipton under Wychwood."

"A dying folk drama," murmured Pons. "But perhaps we ought to proceed to the scene."

"If you'll wait here, I'll get a motor from headquarters."

He ran off at once, mounted his bicycle, and pedaled rapidly down the street.

"Forgive me," I said to Pons, "but what are 'mummers'?"

"Another proof of the persistence of folklore, Parker," he replied. "Living in London, we tend to be in our own urban way quite as insular as, say, the inhabitants of Chipping Norton. We are unaware of the way in which many of our fellow Englishmen live. Folk customs persist throughout the country—Bonfire Day at Lewes—wassailing the apple trees at Carhampton—the Furry Dance in Cornwall—the Morris Dancers in this shire—market festivals in various places—the Knutsford Festival in Cheshire—harvest celebrations of many kinds. The Christmas mummers date back at least eight centuries, and were once to be found in every English village. They have declined in our time."

"But what do they do?"

"Essentially they re-enact some form of the fight between St. George and the Dragon. It may be King George and some other enemy, but this is the central theme of the performance, which is always done in grotesque costumes concealing their bodies and sometimes masks to hide the faces of the participants. Variations include some symbolic representation of the

death of the old year and its resurrection as the new. And sometimes the performances represent sacrificial acts at sowing time—a survival from pagan times to insure a good crop of grain. Though the mummers are reputed to take origin at the time of the Crusades and to be primarily performers in a Christian ritual, there would appear to be a good deal of paganism associated with the custom. The Mummers' Play is interesting particularly to literary scholars; it seems to be the only survival of pre-Reformation folk drama."

"Are these plays performed by professional actors?"

"No, Parker, the roles are all taken by amateurs. Sometimes, I believe, the roles are handed down from father to son. The plays are always performed by men—six or eight of them—and their characters are standard—Father Christmas, King George, Quack Doctor, Lawyer, Bold Slasher, Valiant Soldier, Rumour, and Twing Twang, sometimes called Little Johnnie Jack. The characters' names are evidence of the essential medievalism of the mummers."

The train drew out of the station just as Constable Ruskin returned in his car.

Pons and I got into it and we started away through the village and into the country, once the pastureland of thousands of sheep, when, in previous centuries, the western shires supplied most of the wool used by the weavers in the low countries. It was an upland of gentle slopes and green valleys divided by streams, and dotted with stone cottages and little villages.

The cromlech stood on high ground almost at the boundary of Warwickshire. A grove of larch trees towered above the stones, which appeared to be all of local oolite, badly weathered; they were widely scattered, deeply pitted, and manifestly Bronze Age remnants. None was very high; a few of the stones seemed to be almost as high as a short man, but their average height otherwise was three feet. There seemed to be over fifty of the stones, standing upright under the trees, and making a rough circle of about a hundred feet in diameter. Off to the north side of it stood a single tall stone of over eight feet in height.

The caretaker stood alone near the road, waiting for us. He was a stocky man of middle age, with greying sideboards framing his square-jawed, dogged-looking features; his dark eyes peered out at us from beneath shaggy brows.

"Mr. Pickering," said the constable, "Mr. Solar Pons of London has come to help us in the inquiry."

"Scotland Yard?" asked Pickering.

"We'll call in the Yard only as

a last resort," said the constable hastily, at which Pickering nodded with a quaintly satisfied air, as if for some reason he disapproved of Scotland Yard.

"Right this way, gentlemen," said the caretaker, proceeding across the circle of stones in an easterly direction. Over his shoulder, he asked the constable suspiciously, "Where be the Americans?"

"I have their depositions," said Ruskin with reproving asperity.

Pickering fell into a glowering silence.

"Do the natives visit the stones frequently, Mr. Pickering?" asked Pons.

"Not much, they don't," answered the caretaker. "Some's afeared. S o m e don't care. There's old talk about the place. They do say come midnight All Saints' Day, the stones come to life and go down the hill to drink at the spring. There's some believe the old wives' tale that these stones came about when some witchcraft turned a king and his army into stone." He tittered, but almost at once subsided into an uneasy bravado. "But there's witchcraft about! There's some of us hereabouts who know."

He said nothing more, perhaps because he caught sight of Constable R u s k i n ' s tolerant smile.

We came presently upon the ancient burial chamber, a stone-walled recess which framed a grotesque and terrible scene. In the middle of it lay a huddle of cloth strips and feathers held to the ground by a pitchfork.

"Won't go no farther," said the caretaker abruptly, halting well back from the entrance. He pointed an unsteady finger at the strangely attired corpse. "It's Fletcher Dewson—that's who 'e is—and I say 'e's been served right There's others about who ought to be served the same."

Pons walked over to the body, taking care to step apart from such fragmentary prints as could be seeen. I did not need to be told to do likewise as I made my way toward the dead man's side.

The costume that confronted us was indeed curious. The dead man wore a sort of imitation flower crown, from which long cloth streamers came down to cover his face. The body was that of a man of seventy or so, a wizened old fellow with a scrawny neck and hands, and a pinched face which, in life, appeared to be no stranger to a fixed expression of displeasure. His body was clothed in a coat and trousers to which had been sewn shorter cloth strips of various colors, mingled with feathers which I took to be those of hawks and owls. To the front along the right side of the coat three dolls were attached in such a way as to be an integral part of the costume. The pitchfork

which had been stuck into the dead man's left side—either into or dangerously close to his heart—just missed the near doll with one of its tines.

But the fork was not the only weapon. When I parted the long cloth strips that concealed the old man's face, I saw to my horror that his throat had been torn away by the sickle blade of a trouncing hook, still embedded in the flesh.

Pons, however, experienced none of the horror I felt. His eyes were positively bright with interest. "That is the Little Johnnie Jack costume," he said. "Unless I am very much mistaken, the dolls are associated only with that costume." He turned toward the caretaker, still standing well way behind us. "Mr. Pickering! Was Mr. Dewson a mummer?"

"No mummers hereabouts now," said Pickering.

"Was he at one time a mummer?"

"They do say he was."

"I take it, Parker—judging by the amount of blood—this was the scene of his death?"

"Not a doubt of it," I agreed. "His jugular was severed."

"How long dead?" asked Pons.

"Sometime in the night. Probably about seven hours. That would put the time of his death at around one o'clock this morning."

I got up and stepped back, leaving the field to Pons.

He dropped to his knees beside the body with alacrity, first to examine the costume, then to scrutinize the fork and sickle blade, after which he gave a remarkably close examination to the ground around the body. In two places he carefully gathered up what seemed to me specimens of the soil and put them into the little envelopes he frequently carried. Then he crawled about along the side of the chamber and out toward the entrance, peering intently at the surface of the earth, both where it was exposed and where it was overgrown with short grass.

He reared back on his haunches suddenly. "Mr. Pickering. How many visitors were there yesterday?"

The caretaker appeared to think. Don't rightly think we had any," he said finally. "Nobody applied to see the stones."

"And the day before?"

Pickering shook his head. "No visitors for three days. The Americans this morning were the first in the four days."

"Capital!" cried Pons. He pointed to the ground. "We had rain two days ago, and all the footprints are no more recent than last night or this morning. Here we have your prints, Constable. And here are Mr. Pickering's. And these, I submit, are those of the two American stu-

dents. All have walked in the morning's dew. But this indentation—and this—and this—all by the same foot—were made prior to the formation of the dew; there is dew on them."

Pons was measuring them appraisingly as he spoke. At the edge of one of the prints, where a half buried stick jutted forth, he bent and picked up another pinch of soil for depositing in an envelope. "Constable, look for a man who favors his left leg."

"With a limp?"

"I have not said so."

The caretaker muttered under his breath. "Jock Howells!"

"What was that, Mr. Pickering?" asked Ruskin.

"I say Jock Howells. Walks with a limp, 'e does. Not much to notice. He was another of *them*."

"A friend of the dead man's?" asked Ruskin.

"In a manner of speaking. They were in it together."

"I don't follow that, Mr. Pickering," said the constable, showing some exasperation.

"Mr. Pickering," said Pons abruptly, coming to his feet. "I take it you had no love for Fletcher Dewson."

"You take it right!"

"Nor Jock Howells?"

"Two of a kind. Always meddling with things better left alone."

"What, Mr. Pickering?" put in Ruskin.

"Nothing city blokes would know about," said Pickering. "They do laugh at us. Warlocks! That's what they were. They did all sorts of dark things—black magic and heathenish rites. Twan't only the wind that talked here in the Knights when there was no wind about!"

Ruskin turned to Pons. "The chamber gets its name from the belief that the wind-like sounds here are the whisperings of the knights turned to stone," he said with an apologetic manner.

"Aye! I've heard 'em," said Pickering.

Pons was not listening. He stood now with his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed, his eyes half closed, in an attitude of deep thought. Something significant had either occurred to him, or he had noticed some small detail which had certainly escaped me. The silence was broken by the song of a skylark flying ecstatically overhead. Pons' eyes opened suddenly.

"Where did Dewson live, Mr. Pickering?" he asked.

"You can see the place from the high ground," said Pickering. "A stone cottage."

"Within walking distance?"

"Easy," said Pickering. "It was one time part of the old estate. The old Dewson estate, that is."

"Ah! Dewson was wealthy?"

Pickering gave a short, barking laugh. "Not 'e! 'E's on the

dole." He went on to explain that Dewson's grandfather had been a wealthy man, engaged in the wool trade; he had owned all the land on "this side" of Chipping Norton, including the cromlech. He had had two sons, the one preceding him in death, the other—Dewson's father—his sole heir. Dewson had never married, but he had a sister who had, and a brother. Dewson was the only member of his generation left, but he had a nephew—Arthur Keenan—in Africa, and a niece, Miss Rose Dewson, in Banbury. Dewson, his brother and sister had all inherited substantial sums, even after death duties, but the two men had been improvident, both given to making "wild" investments in foreign lands and worthless stocks, and his sister had had the bad luck to marry a ne'er-do-well, who had gone through her money before taking his own life in Rhodesia.

"Did he see his niece at all?"

"Aye. She came to visit him now and then. Maybe once a quarter. And his nephew wrote him now and then."

"His friends?"

"Not many."

"His enemies, then, Mr. Pickering?"

"Plenty people had no use for Dewson." He seemed reluctant to say more.

"Why?" Pons prodded him.

"I said it before. Jock Howells and him and a few others—they belonged together—they met and had 'rites'. Mr. Welton—Henry Welton—said Dewson put a curse on his house and his old mother died."

"How long ago?"

"Ten years. Welton never spoke to Dewson since. Hated him."

"Dewson and Howells and their friends were still at meeting together?"

"They say not. Two of 'em's dead since."

"I take it this is common knowledge, Mr. Pickering?"

Pickering nodded. "Even the children got out of Dewson's way when 'e came near."

Pons thanked him and turned to Ruskin. "Come along, Constable, and take us over to Dewson's cottage, if you will."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons." He turned to the caretaker. "You stand guard here, Pickering, until the coroner comes."

Pickering nodded.

Walking across the high ground among the Rollright Stones, the constable asked diffidently, "Was there anything significant that caught your eye, Mr. Pons?"

"Let me direct your attention to the costume, Constable. And to the line of footprints."

"There was but one line of footprints before the dew came."

"That is the significant factor."

"Made by a man who favored his left leg when he walked. And, if I read them rightly, a heavy man."

"I doubt you have read them rightly, Constable."

We got into the car once more, and went on for a short distance to stop before a tidy stone cottage, along the front of which blossomed purple loosestrife and stonecrop.

"This was once a sheep-tender's cottage, I believe, sir," said Ruskin. "It probably kept him and his family."

"Close quarters," said Pons.

"They were all small houses, Mr. Pons."

The constable tried the door. It gave, opening upon a compact sitting-room, off which in turn, doors standing ajar gave upon a cubbyhole of a bedroom and an equally small kitchen. Pons' attention was immediately drawn to fragments of cloth which lay on the floor of the sitting-room.

"Are those not pieces of a mummer's costume?" he asked.

Ruskin picked one of them up and handed it to Pons. "This is evidently where he dressed."

"Or was dressed," said Pons. "I submit, Mr. Ruskin, that Dewson was dressed here by his murderer, while Dewson was unconscious. You must have noticed how badly the costume was put on."

"I did that, Mr. Pons."

"The costume is an old one, and the material none too sturdy. See here." He took the ragged strip of cloth and tore it easily in two.

"I see," said the constable. "Then if Dewson was knocked out here, he was carried to the cromlech. That implies not a heavy man, but a strong one. The imprints were deeper than the others because he was carrying Dewson. And there must then be come connection between the scene of Dewson's actual death and the practises of which he was alleged to be guilty."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Pons. "You scarcely have need of my assistance, Constable. I commend you. But let us not proceed too hastily. I think it certain that Dewson was knocked out here, and then taken to the Whispering Knights to be slain. Beyond that point we ought not yet to go. Let us just look about a bit."

He dropped to his knees to examine the worn floor, while the constable examined the top of a small bureau which stood against one wall, in lieu of its proper spot in the bedroom, which was too small to accommodate it, and, finding nothing of significance there, began to pull open drawers, from one of which he took a packet of letters. He took out one of them, removed it from its envelope,

and read it. Then another.

"Well, his niece wrote to him," Ruskin said presently. "And so did his nephew. They evidently cared for him, even if his neighbors had some reservations about him. Listen to this from Keenan: 'Dear Uncle Fletcher, I am just in from the bush and find yours of the seventh. I don't have much money right now, but I am sending you a note. You can buy yourself a little 'baccy with it.'—The old man must have been hitting him for money! 'I hope you are keeping well and are in good health!'—Miss Rose wrote along similar lines, but didn't send any money. Here she is—'If I could be sure you would not spend the money on vile tobacco or liquor, I would send you some. Why do you not permit me to come for you and bring you to stay a while with me here?'—A Puritan, Mr. Pons."

Pons came to his feet again. Ruskin handed him the packet of letters and Pons went rapidly through them. "Yes, he must have been asking often for money," he agreeed. "And both niece and nephew were concerned about his health. They asked repeatedly after it—Miss Rose with moral observations, Keenan with none."

Ruskin, who had rummaged further in the drawers, came out with a long envelope across the face of which had been scrawled "Papers." "Now this looks like something, Mr. Pons," he said, and exchanged it for the letters.

The envelope was not sealed. Pons drew out first a list of debts Dewson had drawn up; some were marked "Pd." and some were not. The old man was still in debt by approximately a hundred pounds. The next paper was a melancholy one indeed; it was a list of his bad investments—stock in long bankrupt corporations, mythical "oil lands" in Canada, deeds for parcels of worthless land in Kenya, India, and Rhodesia. The list revealed only too well what Fletcher Dewson had done with his inheritance—he had squandered in this fashion between five and ten thousand pounds.

"A man without judgment, seemingly," observed Pons.

He drew out the last of the papers. This proved to be a simple will, dated ten years before, in which he left "all my mortal goods, property, and whatever I die possessed of" to his niece and nephew with the pathetic adjuration that "they not squander it as I have done."

The constable chuckled. "Precious little he left them to squander."

Pons handed the envelope back to Ruskin. "I suppose you will have to notify these people, Ctnstable."

"Yes. Miss Rose will be no problem. But if Keenan's in the bush, there's no telling when he

can be reached. Miss Rose will probably take charge of the arrangements. Keenan couldn't get here, anyway, in time for the funeral, and he's hardly likely to come at all."

"I think we've finished here," said Pons then. "Tell me, Constable, where can we find Jock Howells?"

"He's the proprietor of the Black Fleece at the edge of town. On the Charlbury road."

Pons consulted his watch. "I think, Mr. Ruskin, our best course would be to re-engage our rooms at the White Hart. We can catch the noon train to London and be back in Chipping Norton late tomorrow. I have one or two little things I must attend to in London."

"Do you think Howells had a hand in it, Mr. Pons?"

"In time, with our combined efforts, we shall manage to determine that, Mr. Ruskin," said Pons affably.

Pons remained uncommunicative throughout the balance of the morning and the brief lunch we took before we caught the 12:48 train for London. Once in our compartment, however, he broke his self-imposed silence.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

It was the kind of leading question designed solely to persuade from me my own frequently wide-of-the-mark opinions. He knew very well I could not resist the challenge. "It seems to me plainly a case of murder for vengeance."

"Does it not!" he cried. "It recalls to memory the death of Ann Tennant in Long Compton, in 1875. She was an old woman of eighty, stabbed to death with a pitchfork by one James Heywood, who declared her a witch. The fork and the sickle are held peculiarly effective in the disposal of witches and warlocks."

"And Dewson was reputed to be a warlock," I put in.

"So we've been told. It does not seem strange to you that he should have been clad in his mummers' costume?"

"All this superstitious rigmarole is mummery."

"I beg to disagree," said Pons. "The Mummers' Play is a Christian ceremony. Wizardry is its direct opposite. This is diabolic work, Parker."

"Oh, come, Pons!" I cried. "Surely, you don't believe in such claptrap!"

"It is not what *I* believe, but what the late Fletcher Dewson's neighbors may have believed. I, for one, find it difficult to credit one's confusing the Mummer's Play with the black arts."

"I have just done so," I said.

"Ah, but you are not a provincial, Parker."

"And why the cromlech as the site for the murder?" I asked.

Pons chuckled. "That poses

yet another perplexing question. The cromlech is presumably of Druidic origin. Whether Druidism was the survival of an ancient form of oak-tree worship or whether it was the cult of the wise seeker after truth—the authorities are divided on this point—is immaterial. What is significant here is the indisputable fact that Druidism was a form of pagan religion. Dewson's murder in the Whispering Knights therefore draws together three conflicting mythologies, each one opposed to the others. Either this was done out of ignorance or with design."

"Could it not have been simple coincidence?"

Pons brushed this contemptuously aside. "No, no, Parker. It is elementary that this crime was committed in this fashion to impress upon us Dewson's past affiliation with some bucolic cult of diabolism."

"Perhaps they once performed their play at the cromlech?"

"The Mummers' Play is customarily performed in the villages at Christmas or in the fields at the sowing—and before an audience. There could be no conceivable reason for the performance at the cromlech, where the very stones would be in their way. The Christian mummers frequently visit the principal residences during the day, perform before them, and then repair to the inns after dark. The Mummer's Play demands an audience of people — not of stones, Parker."

"Well, it's certainly a puzzle."

"If intended to be so, it is meaningless. But the confusion may not have been intentional," said Pons enigmatically.

Thereafter he said no more, but sat with his head bowed and his eyes closed to the lovely English countryside flashing past the windows of our compartment—through that country Hopkins had so memorably described as "Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmed, rook-racked, river-rounded," a land of drowsy rivers lined with willows. And so he sat until the train drew into Paddington in late afternoon.

Once back in our quarters at 7B Praed Street, with our patient landlady, Mrs. Johnson, getting dinner for us, I went around to arrange for my locum to continue in my office for a few more days—anticipating our return to Chipping Norton, while Pons repaired without delay to his chemical apparatus.

On my return, I found Pons just sitting down to our dinner. As I joined him, I saw that his eyes were dancing.

"Aha!" I cried, "you've discovered something in your envelopes."

"I have indeed," he replied. "Evidently the late Fletcher

Dewson was wealthier than his neighbors suspected."

He pushed over to me a piece of black paper on which lay three tiny particles of what appeared to be glass—one as large as a grain of sand, the others hardly more than dust motes.

"Crystals of some sort," I said.

"These little pieces are technically known as diamond dust, Parker," said Pons.

"Yet he begged tobacco money!" I cried. "You found them in the house?"

"No. In the burial chamber."

"But how came they there?"

"Ah, that is indeed an intriguing problem, Parker. They were in one envelope only—the last I filled. The other envelopes yielded nothing but the expected soil, some fragments of old peregrine falcon feathers, evidently crumpled from the mummer's costume, which appeared to have been quite old and long in disuse, and some particles of cloth either from the costume also, or from Dewson's clothing—or both. I have sent off a wire to Constable Ruskin suggesting a more intensive search of Dewson's house and grounds, particularly the latter, since the soil also revealed grains of a kind of blue-green serpentinous rock. I observed nothing of this sort at the cromlech or in its immediate vicinity. It suggests kimberlite."

"That puts a different complexion on the murder," I said.

"Does it not!" agreed Pons.

"'If he had valuables hidden at his place—and his companions in diabolism somehow learned it!"

"Gently, Parker. I fancy we may stray too far afield. Can you get away for a few more days?"

"I've arranged for another week."

"I fancy we'll not need that long. We'll take the 2:10 from Paddington tomorrow afternoon."

A short, buxom woman, clad in a severe black ensemble and wearing a pince-nez from behind which sharp eyes looked out, waited for us at the White Hart lat the following afternoon. The clerk at the desk made a sign to her at our entrance, and she rose at once to face us, her mouth prim and her mien stern.

"Mr. Solar Pons?" she asked as Pons strode up. At his nod, she introduced herself. "I am Miss Rose Dewson, Mr. Pons. I came to ask that you spare no effort to discover the murderer of my uncle. He was not a man of strong moral character, but he scarcely merited such a death as this."

"Will you come up to our room, Miss Dewson?" asked Pons.

A flicker of disapproval crossed her face. 'That would hardly

be proper, Mr. Pons," she said. "Thank you, no. What I have to say can be said here. I have saved enough money for your fee, and I know my cousin will join me in this."

"Ah you have heard from him?"

"I cabled him at once. I had his reply only an hour ago. He expects to leave Somabula within twelve hours. While he cannot be in time for the services, he will be here to help to settle my poor uncle's estate. Now, Mr. Pons, is there any help I can give you?"

"You saw your uncle from time to time?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Uncle Fletcher was a most improvident man. He did not know how to take care of money. It isn't given to some people. He was one such. I came sometimes to bring him a hamper of food or to take him out to dinner."

"Your uncle was in straitened circumstances?"

"Mr. Pons, he had been on the dole for a long time."

"Did he ever, at any time, suggest that he had hidden resources?"

She smiled fleetingly. "Mr. Pons, the very idea is totally ridiculous. If he had such resources, he would have spent them on liquor, tobacco or on his cronies in the pubs. Mr. Pons, I assure you, my uncle was a poor man. My cousin and I have been contributing what we could to him from time to time."

"Ah, you have been in touch with Mr. Keenan right along?"

"Hardly," she said. "A card at Christmas, no more, up until about two years ago when he wrote to inquire about Uncle Fletcher's health. It surprised me a little, because I had always understood my cousin to be in the family image—inimical to real work, and more or less indifferent to the rest of the family. But many people change with age. Since that time Arthur has written perhaps once a quarter. He seems to be now engaged in mission work among the natives in Rhodesia and surrounding areas, and his kindness toward Uncle Fletcher shows that some Christianity has taken root in him."

"Miss Dewson," said Pons then, dismissing her cousin, "I am not clear in mind as to your uncle's habits."

"Mr. Pons, he lived as a sort of recluse. Oh, he used to go about, but now he seldom went anywhere but to the pubs, especially Jock Howells' Black Fleece."

"We hear tales of his interest in diabolism."

Miss Dewson immediately seemed to withdraw into herself. "I know nothing of that, Mr. Pons."

"He was found, you know, dressed in his mummer's cos-

tume and put to death precisely as warlocks and witches were done away with in centuries past," said Pons.

"My uncle did take part in the Mummer's Play at Christmas, Mr. Pons," said Miss Dewson. "I believe he took the role of Little Johnnie Jack—he was not a big man, you know, but short and slight, and he fit that part. Of course, it may be uncharitable to suggest it—but you do realize that much of the Mummers' Play was performed in the inns and pubs, and I suppose my uncle, who was much given to the consumption of alcohol in various forms, was hardly averse to performing in such places and reaping the customary liquid reward." Of Fletcher Dewson's reputed diabolism she said not a word.

"Very well, Miss Dewson," said Pons. "I will undertake the inquiry."

"Thank you, sir. You will find me at 147 Cherwell Street, Banbury—along the river—if I can be of further help to you."

She smiled tightly, turned, and walked out.

"A tartar," I said.

Pons' eyes twinkled. "She is a lady who knows precisely what she wants, and whose world is clearly divided into what is good and what is bad—and liquor and tobacco are bad, no mistake about it."

We mounted to our room.

"Well, Parker," said Pons, "what ought our next move to be? We shall see how well you've studied my methods."

"Why, that's elementary," I said. "We'll look up Jock Howells."

"Precisely! It delights me to observe your progress. We shall do just that, after a bite of supper."

Before we could leave our room, however, Constable Ruskin presented himself at the door.

"Come in, Constable!" invited Pons. "I see by the look on your face you're more perplexed than ever."

"I am, Mr. Pons," said Ruskin, taking the chair Pons propelled forward. "I am that. Your wire now . . ."

"Ah! You s e a r c h e d the house?"

"Thoroughly."

"And found nothing?" hazarded Pons.

"Nothing. Not even a copper. I doubt the lot of his stuff would fetch ten pounds."

"Curious! Curious!" murmured Pons. "As to the grounds, Constable . . ."

"No evidence of digging there for a long time. But we didn't dig much. We used one of those metal detecting devices. There's nothing in the soil there, Mr. Pons."

"No metal," said Pons dryly. "Tell me, Constable, is there

any blue clay or rock on the property?"

"None, sir."

"Do you know of any in or about Chipping Norton?"

Constable Ruskin looked dubious. I do think there's a bit of blue clay on the Welton land."

Henry Welton?"

"Yes. He has a farm out of Chipping Norton. Raises some corn, and has a few pigs and sheep."

"Pons, is not that the same man who disliked Dewson?" I put in.

Ruskin replied. "He was only one of many, Doctor Parker. Pickering didn't exaggerate at all; I may even say he understated the case. Dewson led a reclusive life. He stayed at home during the past ten years. Now and then he showed himself in Chipping Norton to shop, or he went to the Black Fleece. People normally begin wondering about those who keep to themselves too much, and from the wondering the talking begins."

"There is, however, no doubt but that Dewson was a member of a group that dabbled in diabolism?" asked Pons.

"None. We've had a go at Howells. He won't admit it, he won't deny it. We're official, you see. I thought, now, if you could go out there, Mr. Pons . . .?"

"We expect to, Constable, directly after supper."

"He's an irritable man, sir, and no stranger to violence."

"Nor am I," said Pons, chuckling.

Howells did indeed offer a formidable appearance where he stood behind the bar of his pub when we entered it an hour later. He was a stocky, broad-shouldered man of sixty or thereabouts; his face was grizzled with a short, black stubble, but even a thick moustache did not conceal a sensuous, full-lipped mouth. His eyes were as black as his hair.

We went directly to sit at the bar, where Pons ordered a bitter and I a draught of ale. Howells served us in silence. I observed, as he moved back and forth, that he distinctly favored one leg, and saw that he was manifestly strong enough to have tossed a small man like Dewson on to his back and carried him easily.

"Retired seaman?" said Pons casually.

Howells gave him a sharp glance.

"Late of the *Cathay Prince*," Pons went on.

"Near thirty years ago," Howells growled, suspiciously.

"Retired because of injury to your left knee," continued Pons.

Behind Howells on the wall, I saw the framed photograph of the *Cathay Prince* Pons had seen.

Howells now came over to

stand facing Pons. He gave him a hard look. What's your game, Mister?"

"I want a word with you, Jock."

"You've had it."

"Ever hear of a man named Crowley? Aleister Crowley?"

"What's it to you?"

"The sooner they find out who killed Fletcher Dewson, the sooner they'll let you alone."

Howells flung himself away with an angry snarl. "What's all this about Dewson? They were bothering me before he got killed. First it was that reporter from London. I was fool enough to talk. Then the police. They were here half the day. What's your business?"

"I've been asked by Dewson's family to look into his death," said Pons.

"What's done's done," said Howells. "Sure, we played with Crowley's cult. Devil worship and all that. No harm in it. We never did any harm. But the word got out and talk blew it up to far more than it was. Spells—curses—suchlike—all just words. Never came to a thing. Only *they* thought it did. Welton and Forham and that lot. Dewson family or police—I'll give you one question and that's it."

"Tell me about the reporter who bothered you," said Pons.

For a moment Howells stood agape. Then he shrugged. "Came in maybe eight, nine days ago," he said. "Name of Brown—Ted Brown. Short, slow-moving fellow, about forty-five, for all his thick beard. Wanted to write some kind of story about queer country customs and lore. That sort of thing. I told him about our mummers—we've not done that for years, either—and I talked to him about the little coven we had for the cult, for all it was over and done with long ago. Old Fletch was in here that day, and when he went out I told Brown he'd been one of us. I gave him a few other names. He came in once or twice after that. Asked about Old Fletch and the others. Seemed to think it funny—laughed a bit at us. I saw him nosing about yet this afternoon. He had a room at the White Hart."

"Thank you, Mr. Howells," said Pons.

"What about Dewson, now?" asked Howells, surprised.

"One question, I think, you allowed me," said Pons. "You answered it. I know enough about Fletcher Dewson. If you don't mind, I'll use the telephone and we'll be off."

I waited while Pons put in a call. Then we set out from the Black Fleece to walk back to the White Hart.

"I've asked Constable Ruskin to meet us," said Pons. "Unless I am very much mistaken, we will be on our way back to London by the late train, thanks to Old Fletch's friend."

"Howells!" I cried. "Why, he told us nothing."

"On the contrary. He gave us the only possible corroborative information." And, having said so much, he would say no more, but strode along with an enigmatic smile on his lean, hawk-like face.

Constable Ruskin waited for us at the White Hart.

"Constable," began Pons without preamble, "we'll want Mr. Ted Brown who is registered here."

Ruskin did not question Pons, but went immediately to the clerk and asked for Brown.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ruskin," said the clerk, "but Mr. Brown checked out a few moments before you came. He expected to take the 9:28 for London."

Pons looked at his watch. "A quarter past nine. We have enough time. Brown very probably walked to the station. Parker, arrange to pay our bill and check out. We'll take the same train." And to Ruskin, as he came back from the desk, he said only, "I submit it is of the utmost importance that we talk to Brown before he leaves Chipping Norton. His information will be decisive."

"The car's outside," said the constable. "We can be there in a minute."

We reached the station platform at Chipping Norton almost on the heels of the man we sought, for he was the only bearded passenger awaiting there—a short man, jaunty in appearance, though he walked with a singular dignity.

"Look at his shoes, Parker," murmured Pons.

I saw that one shoe was creased with use; that the left foot was smooth.

Pons went directly up to him and stood, towering over him, to ask, "Mr. Brown? Ted Brown, representing——?"

"*The Daily Express*," said Brown.

"My name is Solar Pons. You may have heard of me."

"I don't know the name," said Brown coolly, making his indifference to us plain.

"Mr. Brown, let me introduce Constable Ruskin," said Pons. "Constable, let me introduce Ted Brown—a reporter who has been busy exploring country lore in Chipping Norton. Mr. Brown is more correctly known as Arthur Keenan, late of Somabula, Rhodesia; he has been busy murdering his uncle so that he can come into control of some diamond-bearing property Fletcher Dewson didn't know he owned."

For a moment Pons' extraordinary announcement seemed to freeze the four of us into a tableau. Then, with an oath, Keenan, flung his bag full in Pons' face—the constable dove

for his legs just as he turned to run—and I fell upon him. After but a brief scuffle, Keenan was subdued.

"Ah, there comes our train," said Pons, brushing dust from his coat, I'll send you a *precis* of the evidence, Constable, and if you need us, we'll come back in time for the assizes."

"As I saw it," explained Pons once we were comfortably settled in our compartment and on the way to London, "the solution of the puzzle turned upon the manner of Dewson's death, specificially, on the curious confusion of mummery, Druidism, and diabolism. We were meant to believe that Dewson had been slain by some one who believed him a warlock—hence the pitchfork and sickle as instruments of death. But for this, neither the mummer's costume nor the setting in the Whispering Knights was pertinent. It followed, therefore, that if the primary assumption were correct—that we were intended to associate Dewson's death with his diabolism—the murderer was ignorant of the fact that there was essentially no connection with the mummer's costume or Druidism.

"I submit that no one native to Chipping Norton would be unaware of this. This suggested, of course, that the real motive for Dewson's death was unrelated to his diabolism. My findings in the Whispering Knights, however, implied a stronger motive than mere vengeance. You will recall that the third pinch of soil—that containing the diamond dust—which I took from the burial chamber came from the embedded footprint beside a twig which had undoubtedly caught in the cuff of the murderer's trousers, for Dewson, we know, did not walk to the cromlech. Now, anyone, working with diamonds, could have collected such dust, but only someone close to their source in kimberlite pipes—as the blue-green serpentious diamantiferous rock is known in Africa—could have also carried with him the grains of that rock.

"Diamonds, you may not know, are found in Europe only in Siberia and the Urals. In Africa and India, yes. In Brazil, British and Dutch Guiana, in Borneo and Australia, among the alluvial deposits and the moraines of several of the United States, notably the Carolinas, Wisconsin, Michigan, California, and some others. But certainly not anywhere in England. Furthermore, the kimberlite pipes are to be found only in Africa. They give Kimberly its name—one long associated with diamonds in the popular imagination. So we are left with an obvious conclusion—that Dewson unwittingly owned diamond-bearing prop-

erty among all the 'worthless' land he had bought, and the bankrupt investments he had made. But Keenan—who was on the spot—discovered it, and what was mistaken for his solicitude and concern about his uncle's health was instead the expression of a hope that he might hear that his uncle's health was failing. Fear that the old man might somehow learn about his potential wealth overcame his judgment.

"He grew impatient and came back to England, bent upon killing his uncle and assuring his claim as one of his uncle's heirs. Very probably he planned to let his cousin keep the cottage in exchange for the 'worthless' land in Rhodesia. He had not been in England for a long time; he may not even have been born here, though I should think it probable that he was and left with his parents for Africa as a child.

"He came to Chipping Norton posing as a reporter and under a false name—surely there must be almost as many Ted Browns as John Smiths in the English-speaking world! — and, nosing about, hit upon the gossip of Dewson's diabolism. It seemed to him that local hatred and superstitious fear of Fletcher Dewson offered a perfectly credible motive for his murder, one far removed from the real motive. No one would have believed that someone had broken into Dewson's cottage and murdered a man on the dole for his money!

"Keenan was reasonably secure. He was unknown. Moreover, his beard was a natural disguise. He was on his way to London or some way station between Chipping Norton and London to remove his beard and, after an interval long enough to allow him 'time' to reach England from Rhodesia, where he undoubtedly had a confederate waiting to answer the cablegram he knew would be sent, he meant to appear in Chipping Norton and play the role of the grieving nephew. As you saw, he has a wooden foot, which was betrayed in the footprints found at the Whispering Knights.

"In his greed, he over-reached himself."

"And any doubt you might have entertained was surely dissipated when Keenan confessed he had never heard of Solar Pons," I said.

"*Touche*!" replied Pons, settling back with a chuckle for the slow journey home.

our feathered friends

by Philip MacDonald

THE HOT, hard August sunshine poured its pale and blazing gold over the countryside. At the crest of the hill, which overlooked a county and a half, the tiny motorcar drawn up to the side of the dusty road which wound up the hill like a white riband looked not so much mechanical as insectile. It looked like a Brobdingnagian bee which, wings folded, has settled for a moment's sleepy basking in the fierce sunshine.

Beside the car, seeming almost ludicrously out of proportion with it, stood a man and a woman. The sum of their ages could not have exceeded forty-five. The dress of the girl, which was silken and slight, would not, at all events upon her charming body, have done aught save grace a car as large and costly

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From the moment when I read the first advance publicity about Alfred Hitchcock's recent movie, THE BIRDS, coupled with the statement that it was based on a story by Dauphne du Maurier, I was bothered by the clear and contradictory recollection that I had read a story on the same theme before, only it was not by Miss du Maurier. In fact, I had already reprinted it once myself, in a paper-back anthology which I edited back in the early 40's.

This is that story. It has taken us longer than I would have wished, to find a copy and clear the necessary permission and get it into print in the Magazine; but I think that most of you will still remember seeing or hearing about or reading about Mr. Hitchcock's picture enough to realize that Philip MacDonald had the same macabre inspiration 20 years and more ago.

I don't suggest that Miss du Maurier had any idea of this when she wrote her story; but I think it is another fascinating demonstration of the truism that almost every original idea has been thought of before. And I think Philip MacDonald should get credit for coming closer to it than most people.

Leslie Charteris

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as this one was minute and cheap. But the clothes of the boy, despite his youth and erect comeliness, were somehow eloquent of Norwood, a careful and not unintelligent clerkliness pursued in the City of London, and a pseudo-charitable arrangement whereby the bee-like motor-car should be purchased, for many pounds more than its actual worth, in small but almost eternal slices.

The girl was hatless, and her clipped golden poll glittered in the sun-rays. She looked, and was, cool, despite the great heat of the afternoon. The boy, in his tweed jacket, thick flannel trousers, and over-tight collar, at whose front blazed a tie which hoped to look like that of some famous school or college, was hot, and very hot. He pulled his hat from his dark head, and mopped at his brow with a vivid handkerchief.

"Coo!" he said. "Hot enough for you, Vi?"

She wriggled slim, half-covered shoulders. "It's a treat!" she said. She gazed about her with wide, blue eyes; she looked down and round at the county-and-a-half. "Where's this, Jack?"

The boy continued to puff and mop. He said:

"Blessed if *I* know! . . . I lost me bearings after that big village place—what was it? . . ."

"Greyne, or some such," said the girl absently. Her gaze was now directed down the hillside to her right, where the emerald roof of a dense wood shone through the sun's gold. There was no breath of wind, even right up upon this hill, and the green of the leaves showed smooth and unbroken.

The boy put on his hat again, "Better be getting on, I s'pose. You've had that leg-stretch you were wanting."

"Ooh! Not *yet*, Jack. Don't let's yet!" She put the fingers of her left hand upon his sleeve. On the third of these fingers there sparkled a ring of doubtful brilliance. "Don't let's go on yet, Jack!" she said. She looked up into his face, her lips pouted in a way which was not the least of reasons for the flashing ring.

He slid an arm about the slim shoulders; he bent his head and kissed thoroughly the red mouth. "Just's *you* like, Vi. . . . But what you want to do?" He looked about him with curling lip. "Sit around up here on this dusty grass and frizzle?"

"Silly!" she said, pulling herself away from him. She pointed down to the green roof. "I want to go down there. . . . Into that wood. Jest to see what its like. Haven't been in a real wood since the summer holidays before last, when Effie an' me went to Hastings. . . . Cummon! Bet it's lovely and cool down there. . . ."

This last sentence floated up to him, for already she was off the narrow road and beginning a slipping descent of the short rough grass of the hillside's first twenty feet.

He went sliding and stumbling after her. But he could not catch up with the light, fragile little figure in its absurdly enchanting wisp of blue silk. The soles of his thick shoes were of leather and, growing polished by the brushing of the close, arid grass, were treacherous. Forty feet down, on the suddenly jutting and only gently sloping plateau where the wood began, he did come up with her: he ended a stumbling, sliding rush with an imperfect and involuntary somersault which landed him asprawl at her feet.

He sat up, shouting with laughter. With a shock of surprise greater than any of his short life, he felt a little foot kick sharply—nearly savagely—at his arm, and heard a tensely whispered "SSH!"

He scrambled to his feet, to see what she was standing facing the trees, her shining golden head thrust forward, her whole body tense as that of a sprinter waiting for the pistol's crack. As wonderingly, he shuffled to take his stand at her shoulder, she said:

"*Listen!* . . . Birds! . . . Jever hear the like? . . ." Her tone was a hushed yet clear whisper—like none he had ever heard her use before.

He said nothing. He stood scowling sulkily down at the grass beneath his feet and rubbing at the spot where her shoe had met his arm.

It seemed to him an hour before she turned. But turn at last she did. He still had his hand at the kicked arm, for all the world as if it really were causing him pain. From beneath his brows he watched her, covertly. He saw the odd rapt look leave the small face once more its pertly, pretty self; saw the blue eyes suddenly widen with memory of what she had done. . . .

And then soft warm arms came about his neck and by their pressure pulled down his head so that, close pressed against him and standing upon tiptoe, she might smother his face with the kisses of contrition.

He said in answer to the pleas for forgiveness with which the caresses were interspersed:

"Never known you do a thing like that before, Vi!"

"No," she said. "And you never won't again; Reely, Jack darling! . . . It . . . it . . ."—a cloud came over the blue eyes—"it . . . I don't rightly know what came over me. . . . I was listening to the birds. . . . I never heard the like . . . and . . . and I never heard you till you laughed . . . and I dunno *what* it was, but it

seemed 's if I jest *had* to go on hearing what the birds were . . . 's if it was . . . was *wrong* to listen to anything else. . . . Oh, *I* dunno!"

The small face was troubled and the eyes desperate with the realization of explanation's impossibility. But the mouth pouted. The boy kissed it. He laughed and said:

"Funny kid, you!" He drew her arm through the crook of his and began to walk towards the first ranks of the trees. He put up his free hand and felt tenderly at the back of his neck. He said:

"Shan't be sorry for some shade. Neck's gettin' all sore." They walked on, finding that the trees were strangely further away than they had seemed. They did not speak, but every now and then the slim, naked arm would squeeze the thick, clothed arm and have its pressure returned.

They had only some ten paces to go to reach the fringe of the wood when the girl halted. He turned his head to look down at her and found that once more she was tense in every muscle and thrusting the golden head forward as if the better to hear. He frowned; then smiled; then again bent his brows. He sensed that there was somewhere an oddness which he knew he would never understand—a feeling abhorrent to him, as, indeed, to most men. He found that he, too, was straining to listen.

He supposed it must be birds that he was listening for. And quite suddenly he laughed. For he had realized that he was listening for something which had been for the last few moments so incessantly in his ears that he had forgotten he was hearing it. He explained this to the girl. She seemed to listen to him with only half an ear, and for a moment he came near to losing his temper. But only for a moment. He was a good-natured boy, with sensitive instincts serving him well in place of realized tact.

He felt a little tugging at his arm and fell into step with her as she began to go forward again. He went on with his theme, ignoring her patently half-hearted attention.

"Like at a dance," he said. "You know, Vi—you never hear the noise of the people's feet on the floor unless you happen to listen for it, an' when you do listen for it an' hear that sort of *shishing*—then you know you've been hearing it all the time, see? That's what we were doing about the birds. . . ." He became suddenly conscious that, in order to make himself clearly heard above the chattering, twittering floor of bird-song, he was speaking in a tone at least twice as loud as the normal. He said:

"Cool . . . You're right, Vi. *I* never heard anything like it!"

They were passing now through the ranks of the outer line of trees. To the boy, a little worried by the strangeness of his adored, and more than a little discomfited by the truly abnormal heat of the sun, it seemed that he passed from an inferno to a paradise at one step. No more did the sun beat implacably down upon the world. In here, under the roof of green which no ray pierced but only a gentle, pervading, filtered softness of light, there was a cool peacefulness which seemed to bathe him, instantly, in a placid bath of contentment.

But the girl shivered a little. She said:

"Oh! It's almost cold in here!"

He did not catch the words. The chirping and carolling which was going on all about and above them seemed to catch up and absorb the sound of her voice.

"Drat the birds!" he said. "What you say?"

He saw her lips move, but though he bent his head, did not catch a sound. There had come, from immediately above their heads the furious squeaks and flutterings of a bird-quarrel.

"Drat the birds!" he said again.

They were quite deep in the wood now. Looking round, he could not see at all the sun-drenched grass plateau from which they had come. He felt a tugging at his arm. The girl was pointing to a gently sloping bed of thick moss which was like a carpet spread at the foot of an old and twisted tree.

They sauntered to this carpet and sat down upon it, the boy sprawling at his ease, the girl very straight of back, with her hands clasped tightly about her raised knees. Had he been looking at her, rather than at the pipe he was filling, he would have seen again that craning forward of her head.

He did not finish the filling of his pipe. The singing of the birds went on. It seemed to gather volume until the whole world was filled with its chaotic whistling. The boy found, now that he had once consciously listed for and to it, that he could not again make his ears unconscious of the sound; the sound which, with its seemingly momentarily increased volume, was now so plucking at the nerves within his head—indeed over his whole body—that he felt he could not much longer endure it. He thrust pipe and pouch savagely back into his pocket and turned to say to the girl that the quicker they got away from this blinking twittering the better he'd be pleased.

But the words died upon his lips. For even as he turned he

became aware of a diminution of the reedy babel. He saw, too, calmer now with the decrease of irritation, that the girl was still in rapt attention.

So he held his tongue. The singing of the birds grew less and lesser with each moment. He began to feel drowsy, and once caught himself with a startled jerk from the edge of actual slumber. He peered sideways at his companion and saw that still she sat rigid; not by the breadth of a hair had she altered her first attentive pose. He felt again for pipe and pouch.

His fingers idle in the jacket-pocket, he found himself listening again. Only this time he listened because he wanted to listen. There was now but one bird who sang. And the boy was curiously conscious, hearing these liquid notes alone and in the fullness of their uninterrupted and almost unbearable beauty, that the reason for his hatred of that full and somehow discordant chorus which a few moments ago had nearly driven him from the trees and their lovely shelter had been his inability to hear more than an isolated note or two of this song whose existence then he had realized only subconsciously.

The full, deep notes ceased their rapid and incredible trilling, cutting their sound off sharply, almost in the manner of an operatic singer. There was, then, only silence in the wood. It lasted. for the town-bred boy and girl caught suddenly in this placid whirlpool of natural beauty, for moments which seemed strained and incalculable ages. And then into this pool of pregnant no-sound were dropped, one by one, six exquisite jewels of sound, each pause between these isolated loveliness being of twice the duration of its predecessor.

After the last of these notes—deep and varying and crystal-pure, yet misty with unimaginable beauties—the silence fell again; a silence not pregnant, as the last, with a vibrant foreshadowing of the magic to come, but a silence which had in it the utter and miserable quietness of endings and nothingness.

The boy's arm went up and wrapped itself gently about slim, barely covered shoulders. Two heads turned, and dark eyes looked into blue. The blue were abrim with unshed tears. She whispered:

"It was *him* I was listening to all the while. I could hear *that* all . . . all through the others . . . ."

A tear brimmed over and rolled down the pale cheek. The arm about her shoulders tightened, and at last she relaxed. The little body grew limp and lay against his strength.

"You lay quiet darling," he said. His voice trembled a little.

And he spoke in the hushed voice of a man who knows himself in a holy or enchanted place.

Then silence. Silence which weighed and pressed upon a man's soul. Silence which seemed a living deadness about them. From the boy's shoulder came a hushed, small voice which endeavoured to conceal its shaking. It said:

"I . . . I . . . felt all along . . . we shouldn't . . . shouldn't be here. . . . We didn't ought to 've come. . ."

Despite its quietness there was something like panic in the voice.

He spoke reassuring words. To shake her from this queer repressed hysteria, he said these words in a loud and virile tone. But this had only the effect of conveying to himself something of the odd disquiet which had possessed the girl.

"It's cold in here," she whispered suddenly. Her body pressed itself against him.

He laughed; an odd sound. He said hastily:

"Cold! You're talking out of the back of your neck, Vi."

"It is," she said. But her voice was more natural now. "We better be getting along; hadn't we?"

He nodded. "Think we had," he said. He stirred as if to get to his feet. But a small hand suddenly gripped his arm and her voice whispered:

"Look! *Look!*" It was her own voice again, so that, even while he started a little at her sudden clutch and the urgency of her tone, he felt a wave of relief and a sudden quietening of his own vague but discomfortable uneasiness.

His gaze followed the line of her pointing finger. He saw, upon the carpeting of rotten twigs and brown mouldering leaves, just at the point where this brown and the dark cool green of their moss-bank met, a small bird. It stood upon its slender sticks of legs and gazed up at them, over the plump bright-hued breast, with shining little eyes. It's head was cocked to one side.

"D'you know," said the girl's whisper, "that's the first one we've *seen?*"

The boy pondered for a moment. "Gosh!" he said at last. "So it is and all!"

They watched in silence. The bird hopped nearer.

"Isn't he *sweet,* Jack?" Her whisper was a delighted chuckle.

"Talk about tame!" said the boy softly. "Cunning little beggar!"

Her elbow nudged his ribs.

She said, her lips barely moving:

"Keep still. If we don't move, I believe he'll come right up to us."

Almost on her words, the bird hopped nearer. Now he was

actually upon the moss, and thus less than an inch from the toe of the girl's left shoe. His little pert head, which was of a shining green with a rather comically long beak of yellow, was still cocked to one side. His bright, small eyes still surveyed them with the unwinking stare of his kind.

The girl's fascinated eyes were upon the small creature. She saw nothing else. Not so the boy. There was a nudge, this time from his elbow.

"Look there!" he whispered, pointing. "And there!"

She took, reluctantly enough, her eyes from the small intruder by her foot. She gazed in the directions he had indicated. She gasped in wonder. She whispered:

"Why, they're *all* coming to see us!"

Everywhere between the boles of the close-growing trees were birds. Some stood singly, some in pairs, some in little clumps of four and more. Some seemed, even to urban eyes, patently of the same family as their first visitor, who still stood by the white shoe, staring up at the face of its owner. But there were many more families. There were very small birds, and birds of sparrow size but unsparrowlike plumage, and birds which were a little bigger than this, and birds which were twice and three times the size. But one and all faced the carpet of moss and stared with their shining eyes at the two humans who lay upon it.

"This," said the boy, "is the rummest start *I* ever . . ."

The girl's elbow nudged him to silence. He followed the nod of her head and, looking down, saw that the first visitor was now perched actually upon her instep. He seemed very much at his ease there. But he was no longer looking up at them with those bright little eyes. And his head was no longer cocked to one side: it was level, so that he appeared to be in contemplation of a silk-clad shin.

Something—perhaps it was a little whispering, pattering rustle among the rotting leaves of the wood's carpet—took the boy's fascinated eyes from this strange sight. He lifted them to see a stranger; a sight perhaps more fascinating, but with by no means the same fascination.

The birds were nearer. Much, much nearer. And their line was solid now; an unbroken semi-circle with bounding-line so wide-flung that he felt rather than saw its extent. One little corner of his brain for an instant busied itself with wild essays at numerical computation, but reeled back defeated by the impossibility of the task. Even as he stared, his face pale now, and his eyes wide with something like terror, that semi-circle drew yet nearer, each unit of it

taking four hops and four hops only. Now, its line unmarred, it was near the edge of the moss.

But was it only a semi-circle? A dread doubt of this flashed into his mind.

One horrified glance across his shoulder told him that semi-circle it was not. Full circle it was.

Birds, birds, birds! Was it possible that the world itself should hold such numbers of birds?

Eyes! Small, shining, myriad button-points of glittering eyes. All fixed upon him . . . and—God! —upon *her*. . . .

In one wild glance he saw that as yet she had not seen. Still she was in rapt, silent ecstasy over her one bird. And this now sat upon the outspread palm of her hand. Close to her face she was holding this hand. . . .

Through the pall of silence he could feel those countless eyes upon him. Little eyes; bright, glittering eyes. . . .

His breath came in shuddering gasps. He tried to get himself in hand; tried, until the sweat ran off him with the intensity of his effort, to master his fear. To some extent he succeeded. He would no longer sit idle while the circle . . . while the circle. . . .

The silence was again ruffled upon its surface by a rustling patter. . . . It was one hop this time. It brought the semi-circle fronting him so near that there were birds within an inch of his feet.

He leapt up. He waved his arms and kicked out and uttered one shout which somehow cracked and was half-strangled in his throat.

Nothing happened. At the edge of the moss a small bird, crushed by his kick, lay in a soft, small heap.

Not one of the birds moved. Still their eyes were upon him.

The girl sat like a statue in living stone. She had seen, and terror held her. Her palm, the one bird still motionless upon it, still was outspread near her face.

From high above them there dropped slowly into the black depths of the silence one note of a sweetness ineffable. It lingered upon the breathless air, dying slowly until it fused with the silence.

And then the girl screamed. Suddenly and dreadfully. The small green poll had darted forward. The yellow beak had struck and sunk. A scarlet runnel coursed down the tender cheek. Above the lingering echo of that scream there came another of those single notes from on high.

The silence died then. There was a whirring which filled the air. That circle was no more. There were two feathered mounds which screamed and ran and leapt, and at last lay and were silent. . . .

the mouse trap

by Michael Innes

"Is THAT Sir John Appleby?" the voice asked. And it added, "Of Scotland Yard?"

"Appleby speaking. But you've been put through to me at my home address."

"I know, I know. And I'm most terribly sorry." The voice—it appeared to be that of a lowland Scot—was quite at ease in its apology. "I hope I haven't fetched you from your dinner."

Appleby, who found that he had brought his table-napkin with him to the telephone, said nothing. He had received this sort of call before.

"My only warrant for breaking in upon your privacy, Sir John, is a common friend. Lord Arthur Spendlove."

"Ah, yes." Appleby didn't precisely kindle. This gambit, too, he was familiar with.

"Arthur has told me how absolutely one can rely upon your discretion. I ought to say that my name is Macrae—Robert Macrae." The voice paused very briefly, as if upon this information Appleby ought decidedly

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Michael Innes has, for more than a quarter of a century, contributed more than most to the stature of this field. Many of his novels, including SILENCE OBSERVED (1961), THE LONG FAREWELL (1958), THE PAPER THUNDERBOLT (1951), APPLEBY'S END (1945), APPLEBY OF ARARAT (1941) and HAMLET REVENGE (1937) are about John Appleby of Scotland Yard.

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Mr Willis Kingsley Wing

not to have to cast about in his mind. And, in point of fact, the name did ring a bell. Robert Macrae was a very distinguished industrial chemist, and the head of a firm of high scientific reepute. "Discretion," the voice went on, "is the essential thing. I want to consult you in the strictest confidence."

"My dear sir, you speak as if I were a family solicitor or a physician or a private inquiry agent. As it happens, I'm an Assistant Commissioner of Police. I can't possible undertake to entertain confidential communications."

"Quite so, quite so." The voice was now betraying a shade of agitation. "But this is so *very* difficult a matter. Threats. Menaces. Or can it be a joke? Your experience could advise me. I'd hate to visit disgrace on what may be a mere whim or prank. But there are circumstances that make me . . . apprehensive. Could you run down?"

"Run down?" Appleby was so surprised that he repeated the words mechanically.

"Yes—and at once." The voice gave an address. That's on the river, you know, just short of Bainton. Say forty minutes." Suddenly the voice spoke on a new queer note. "My God—it may be life or death to me!"

"If you consider yourself to be in some immediate danger, Dr. Macrae, you should contact your local police-station at once."

"No, no—that's just what I want to avoid. But you'll come."

"Yes, I'll come", In saying this, Appleby felt fleetingly that he was acting almost as oddly as Macrae was. Without ceremony, he put down the receiver. Five minutes later, he was driving rapidly west.

An estate-agent would have described Dr. Macrae's house as standing in its own grounds. In the deepening summer dusk Appleby could just distinguish that these seemed to consist mostly of shrubberies, together with a tree-shaded lawn running down to the river at the back. A burglar's paradise, he told himself professionally as he took the last curve of the drive. The house itself was large and gloomy, and from this aspect showed only a single light—a feeble glimmer in a porch before what must be the front door. The effect wasn't welcoming.

Not that the place was at all tumbledown. There was plenty of fresh paint in a forbidding chocolate tone, and through the open doors of a garage Appleby had glimpsed a couple of opulent cars. Their owner was presumably a wealthy man. But there was no sign that he was a particularly cheerful one.

Appleby rang the bell. It was of the antique sort that peals loud and long and in some re-

mote kitchen. There was rather a lengthy wait and then the front door opened. An ancient female servant, heavily armoured in starched linen before and on top, peered at the visitor suspiciously. "Who are ye for?" she asked in a strong Scottish accent.

"Good evening. I am Sir John Appleby. I have an appointment with Dr. Macrae."

"An appointment?" The old woman seemed to regard this claim as an occasion of increased misgiving. "Come in, then. But ye'll hae to see Miss Hatt."

"My appointment is with Dr. Macrae himself."

"Naebody sees the Doctor until Miss Hatt's had a worrd wi' him. This way."

Appleby found himself in a high, dusky hall. The panelled walls were ornamented with enormous oil-paintings of deer and Highland cattle, interspersed with claymores, dirks and the species of small round shield conventionally associated with Rob Roy Macgregor. It was apparent that Dr. Macrae cherished his Caledonian ancestry. They moved down a long corridor and came to a closed door at the end. In the room beyond, a man was talking, fluently and incisively, to the accompaniment of a clattering typewriter. The old woman opened the door and motioned Appleby forward. "A gentleman to see the Doctor," she said.

The typewriter stopped, but the voice—a Scottish voice—continued. It was advancing cogent reasons for being unable to subscribe to a charity organisation. Then the voice stopped too. Miss Hatt had silenced it by turning a switch on her dictaphone. "Your name?" she said.

"Sir John Appleby."

"You have an appointment with Dr. Macrae?"

"He made an appointment with me by telephone, just an hour ago."

Miss Hatt, although her speech was quite dauntingly severe, was personable and in early middle-age. She suggested the possession of high professional proficiency, together with certain quite different qualities which might declare themselves upon appropriate occasions. At the moment, she appeared rather at a loss. Appleby guessed that his name had conveyed quite a lot to her. There was nothing surprising about that. But he rather wondered why she was so clearly perplexed by his visit. There might be half a dozen occasions for it, after all. "Then will you wait a moment," she asked, "while I tell Dr. Macrae you are here?"

Briskly and competently, Miss Hatt rose and left the room. Her manner was entirely as it should be; nevertheless Appleby

found himself obscurely called upon to notice that her figure was excellent and her complexion really beautiful. He waited in solitude and patience—for he wasn't, as it happened, without something to think about. He waited rather a long time. And then Miss Hatt came in again. She was still brisk and competent—which made it a little odd that the beautiful complexion had vanished. Her face was pale and seemed faintly moist. "Did you *know*?" she ask-

"I beg your pardon?"

"You *are* Sir John Appleby—of the police? When you sent me to find Dr. Macrae, you knew that . . . he was dead?"

The queerness of this question was almost as surprising as the news it conveyed. But it wasn't quite crazy. It was, in fact, just the sort of logic one sometimes gets from persons suffering from severe shock. "Nothing of the sort, madam. Put such an idea out of your head." Appleby walked up to the woman and looked at her searchingly but sympathetically. "You have actually found Dr. Macrae dead?" he asked. "You are certain of it?"

She turned and gestured him out of the room. He could hear her taking a deep, gasping breath, as if determined to regain control of herself. "You will be certain yourself in a moment, Sir John. Dr. Macrae has been . . . he has been murdered."

They went down another corridor and through a couple of baize covered doors. The dead man appeared to have prized seclusion. His study was a book-lined apartment, sombre like everything else in this house, and fronting the lawn that ran down to the river. A french window was open upon the warm July night, and directly before this the body of Robert Macrae sat at a large desk. Appleby walked round this. "Or perhaps," he heard Miss Hatt say behind him, "it might be suicide?"

It certainly hadn't been that. Macrae had been shot clean through the forehead at just short of point-blank range. His assailant had presumably walked up to the french window out of the darkness, killed his man, and walked away again. Appleby frowned. He didn't like the simplicity of the thing. It is elaborately conceived murder that it is easier to get a grip on. "Suicide?" he said, and turned to Miss Hatt. He spoke as if with an entirely open mind. "It comes into your head as likely? Was Dr. Macrae a sick man, or worried?"

"His arthritis was troubling him, and he found it rather difficult to get about. But I don't think it seriously worried him. Of course, he had been working very hard. He and Mr. Ivor—that is his nephew, Ivor Macrae—have been on the verge of

some extremely important discovery – a chemical process which would revolutionise man-made fibres."

"I see. Does Mr. Ivor Macrae live here?"

"No, not now." Miss Hatt hesitated "Only Mr. Colin lives in the house. He is Mr. Ivor's brother."

"And also a chemist?"

"Colin—Mr. Colin—is an author."

"Ah, an author." Appleby, intent on examining the body, seemed to repeat the word absently. But he was really wondering if he had been right in detecting a note of warmth in Miss Hatt's voice. "But Mr. Ivor too lived here until recently?"

Miss Hatt nodded. She was standing quite still near the door. It wasn't necessary to tell her not to wander about. As well as a good figure she had a good head. "Yes," she said. "But now Mr. Ivor has a cottage of his own just up the river. He had a —a dispute with his uncle. It has been a great worry to Dr. Macrae, particularly as they work so closely together at the laboratories."

"A professional dispute?"

"No. It has been entirely a family matter. Mr. Ivor's father left a peculiar will, giving the control of very considerable property to Dr. Macrae during his lifetime. Mr. Ivor has felt the position to be increasingly absurd. As a result there was—well, almost a quarrel."

Appleby looked hard at Miss Hatt. "And now"—and he pointed with a certain grimness at the dead man—"Mr. Ivor will get what he has wanted?"

"I suppose so."

"And Mr. Colin too?"

Just perceptibly, Miss Hatt hesitated. She was still quite startlingly pale. "Oh, certainly. But, of course, he didn't break with his uncle in any way. I don't think property and money mean very much to Mr. Colin Macrae. As I've said, he is an author—an artist."

"That makes a difference, no doubt." Permitting himself this fleeting irony, Appleby took a prowl around the room. "Is Mr. Colin at home now?"

Miss Hatt was about to reply when there was an interruption. Abruptly out of the night, a man had appeared at the french window. "Hullo," he said. "Who's t-t-taking about m-me?"

It couldn't be said, Appleby reflected a few minutes later, that Colin Macrae took his uncle's sudden and shocking death very hard. But then it seemed likely that he didn't take things in general that way. He was easy-going, loquacious despite his pronounced stammer, and possessed of a personal modesty that Appleby didn't seem to recall as a very regular

endowment of authors. And there was certainly something between him and Miss Hatt. He would do a lot for her, Appleby guessed. And perhaps she would do even more for him.

"B-b-but doesn't Ivor know?" Colin turned inquiringly to Miss Hatt. "He hasn't b-been over?"

"Certainly he has been over. I came upon him with Dr. Macrae in this room half an hour ago." Miss Hatt was now impassive. "So it surprised me that Dr. Macrae had made an appointmen with Sir John. But when I came to tell Dr. Macrae of Sir John's arrival, Mr. Ivor, of course, wasn't here. There was only . . . the body."

A moment's silence succeeded upon this. It was broken by Appleby. "When he came to see his uncle, Mr. Ivor was in the habit of simply walking in?"

"Yes. Or sometimes he would drop down the river in his dinghy and walk across the lawn."

"He had that familiar habit, despite the quarrel?"

"I wouldn't c-c-call it a quarrel?" Colin Macrae had broken in, suddenly eager. "It's t-t-too strong a word. But Ivor is no good at p-personal relations. Too intellectual and h-h-highly strung. B-brains all the time. Archaeology instead of g-g-golf. Chess-problems, and competitions in high-brow weeklies, instead of thrillers and the p-p-pools. The P-p-proceedings of the Royal Society as a b-bedtime book." Colin paused, as if vaguely aware of rambling. "N-n-not quarrelsome — n-n-not really."

"But he did quarrel with Dr. Macrae, all the time." Miss Hatt's impassivity had hardened.

"Were they quarrelling when you came upon them half an hour ago?" Appleby asked this question gently.

Miss Hatt had one of her moments of fleeting irresolution. "Dr. Macrae was denying something. I heard him say, rather hotly, 'I don't know what you're talking about.' I had taken Dr. Macre one or two letters to sign. But it was clearly an awkward moment, and I came away at once."

Again there was a silence. This time it was broken by the *purr-purr* of a telephone on the desk. There was something indefinably sinister in this summons addressed to an ear now sealed by death. Appleby brought a handkerchief from his pocket and picked up the receiver gingerly in its folds. He listened for some moments in silence. "Unfortunately not," he said. "I am, in fact, a police officer . . . I regret to have to tell you of Dr. Macrae's sudden death. . . . Yes, death. . . . Yes, I think you very usefully might. . . . At once? But certainly. Come right over now." He put down

the receiver and stood motionless for a moment, frowning. He might have been trying to make sense of something he had heard. "Somebody called Cokayne," he said presently. "Declares himself to have rung up Dr. Macrae because he felt uneasy."

"Uneasy?" Miss Hatt spoke sharply.

"Yes—but he didn't explain himself further. He's coming along, however, straight away. A colleague, I gather."

"The principal research assistant, working closely with Dr. Macrae and Mr. Ivor. He lives in the village." Miss Hatt was now composed and once more entirely business-like. "Ought we not to try to contact Mr. Ivor, Sir John?"

"His cottage is on the telephone? Then would you mind, Miss Hatt, going to another instrument, and trying to get him on that? I want this one handled as little as possible. And get the local police-station at the same time, and tell the fellow on duty what's happened. And tell him that I'm here. He'll know how to proceed." Appleby waited until the secretary had left the room, and then turned to Colin Macrae. "Is there—or was there—anything very valuable in this room?"

Colin shook his head. "I d-d-don't think so. All my uncle's things were s-s-solid, but not really good. He had no t-t-taste whatever." Colin paused to glance at the body. "And the s-s-set-up doesn't suggest his coming upon a thief."

"Perfectly true," Appleby was now systematically searching the room. "There's nothing," he said suddenly and sharply, "you ought to tell me?"

"I d-d-don't think so." Colin seemed unperturbed by the abrupt question.

"Do you think Miss Hatt knows anything?"

"It's not my business to speak for her."

"But you might be described as in one another's confidence?"

"That's quite irrelevant. I won't d-discuss it."

Appleby looked curiously at Colin Macrae. "Very well. But we don't yet know what *is* relevant. This is a complicated affair."

"I'd have thought it rather a s-s-simple one."

"That was my way of thinking, until a few minutes ago." Appleby was walking over to the fireplace—in which, despite the mildness of the summer night, a low fire was burning. "But now I've changed my mind." For a moment he stood quite still, staring into the small dull glow. Suddenly he stooped and fished something from a corner of the grate. It was a piece of charred paper.

"Have you found a c-c-clue,

Sir John?" Colin Macrae, who a moment before had been reticent and dry, now spoke almost mockingly.

"It looks to be precisely that, doesn't it?" Appleby's reply was in the same tone. Nevertheless it was with an absorbed seriousness that he carried his find to a table, smoothed it out, and studied it. He studied it for a long time. Then he brought a notebook from his pocket, tore out a couple of leaves, and with these covered all but a narrow strip of paper. "What I have found is part of a letter," he said. "Would you mind coming over and looking at it?"

Colin crossed the room silently and looked. Having done so, he showed no disposition to speak.

"Perhaps you can tell me whose writing this is?"

"It isn't c-c-clear to me that I ought to offer an opinion—or discuss the matter f-further with you at all, Sir John."

"I'm not asking for an opinion. I'm asking for assured knowledge, if you happen to have it."

"V-v-very well. It is my brother's writing—Ivor's writing."

"Thank you. And can you——"

Appleby paused as Miss Hatt entered the room again. They both turned to her expectantly. "I got the police," she said. "But there was no reply from Mr. Ivor. I wonder whether——" Suddenly she broke off with a startled cry. Following her gaze, both men swung round.

Somebody else was now standing in the french window. It was a young woman. She could scarcely have been more than twenty. She was staring at the dead man with a look of transfixed horror. And then she cried out. "Ivor . . . Ivor—where are you?" She looked round the brightly lit room helplessly, and began to sway oddly on her feet. Making a dive forward, Appleby caught her as she fainted away.

The local police had come, and with them the police surgeon. Presently there would be detectives and photographers. Appleby had dismissed both Miss Hatt and Colin Macrae for the moment, and had himself withdrawn into another room. The latest arrival had been quickly restored to consciousness. But there seemed to be no reason why she should be interviewed in the presence of the corpse. Her name was Joyce Hereward. Once calmed and reassured, she gave an entirely coherent account of herself. But she remained in a considerable state of anxiety, all the same.

"Ivor Macrae and I are engaged. We are to be married this autumn. I live with my parents just beyond the village. Ivor and I go on the river a lot. He has a dinghy for messing a-

bout, and also a small motor-launch. This evening we were going to take a late picnic out in the launch. So I told my parents, and walked over to the cottage."

Joyce Hereward paused. She had felt it important, Appleby thought, to get in that bit about her parents. She was very young, and almost certainly wholly ingenuous. "You had arranged this picnic some time ago?" Appleby asked.

"Yes, indeed. I've been looking forward to it all week!" For the first time Miss Hereward faintly smiled. "But just as we set out, Ivor was brought a telephone message, asking him to call on his uncle. We decided to do it on the way. So we tied up at the landing-stage here, and Ivor walked up to the house. I waited in the launch. We thought he wouldn't be long."

"There was no suggestion that you might come up to the house too?"

"No. Of course I know—I mean I knew—Dr. Macrae. But we thought it would be just be business. And then there was the fact——" The girl hesitated and fell awkwardly silent.

"You mean the fact that your uncle and your *fiance* had ceased to be on very good terms?"

"Yes." She nodded, at once apprehensive and grateful. "So I stopped. But it was quite a long time, after all. And then I thought I heard somebody—a man—cry out for help. It was getting nearly dark. I tried to persuade myself that what I had heard was something quite different—just somebody giving an ordinary sort of shout. So I went on waiting. But Ivor didn't come and didn't come. Suddenly I became frightened. So I landed and walked up to the house. The light in the study window seemed to—to suggest security, and I made straight for it. I told myself I'd find Dr. Macrae and Ivor just talking away. But you know what I *did* find."

Appleby nodded kindly. "Yes, indeed. And I am very sorry that you had the shock."

Suddenly the girl's lip quivered. "But Ivor! Please, please, what has happened to him?"

It took Appleby a second to knowknow how to meet this appeal. "That," he said gravely, is something that I think we shall know quite soon."

"He wouldn't be . . . suspected? Ivor could never do a thing like that."

"I'm afraid that everybody concerned, Miss Hereward, must in some degree be suspected—until we clear the matter up."

"Can I help?" She was suddenly eager.

And once more Appleby produced his crumpled piece of paper. This time he concealed no part of it. "Is this your *fiance's* handwriting?"

She glanced at it only a moment. "Yes, it is." She looked pitifully up at him, as if hoping to discover that this was good news. What she saw made her shrink a little. "It can't mean anything bad?"

"Its mean—or its significance—is obscure to me, Miss Hereward. And that, perhaps, is something. For it ought, you see, to be as damnably clear as daylight."

"You mean——?"

Appleby shook his head. And as he did so, the front doorbell pealed. "At least," he said, "we're making progress. For here, I think, is the last of our *dramatis personae*. Will you go and join Miss Hatt for a little? I must see this fellow on his own."

Charles Cokayne was smooth and featureless. Quite soon after a casual meeting, one would probably recall only that he had a cold grey eye.

"Why was I uneasy?" He made a small restrained gesture. "It is this family quarrel. For months it has been upsetting the relations of Dr. Macrae with his nephew Ivor. That has been very bad for our work."

"And the work is very important just now? There is a big discovery pending?"

Cokayne smiled faintly. "That is the sort of story that is always going round. One day—perhaps, yes. But my chiefs, I think, had still rather a long way to go. And the friction between them didn't help."

"I see. And your uneasiness ——"

"What I have feared is the secretary here, Miss Hatt. She is secretly passionate on Colin Macrae's behalf. And I believe her to be very unscrupulous. Yesterday I heard from Ivor Macrae that she had betrayed herself in a flash of temper as keyed up to any mischief. So I have been worried. And this evening I thought I would ring up Dr. Macrae, and then come across and have a serious word with him about the situation."

"You were on terms with him that made that an appropriate course? He would have welcomed your intervention and counsel?"

Cokayne made his small gesture again. "I could only hope so, Sir John."

"You had no worries, no suspicions, about Ivor Macrae?"

"But certainly not!" Cokayne was emphatic. "Ivor is rash, and he had this open break with his uncle. But I have worked for him and with him for years, and I would never believe ill of him."

"That is very gratifying." And once again Appleby fished the enigmatic scrap of paper from his pocket. "You would agree that this fragment of a letter is in Ivor Macrae's hand? I wonder, Mr. Cokayne, if you would

oblige me by reading it—aloud?"

Cokayne raised his eyebrows—as he well might at this slightly strange request. Appleby wondered whether the action didn't reveal in the eyes themselves some glint of excitement. In Cokayne's hand, however, there was no tremor as he took the charred and crumpled paper. And what he read was in an even, carefully expressionless voice:

"My dear Uncle,

"You have twenty-four hours. If this surprises you, the fault is mine for hesitating as I have done. But if you have come to think of me as a man who cannot make up his mind, then you are, believe me, fatally wrong. Give up what you have unjustly taken, or you will not live to enjoy even what is rightfully yours. And decide within, I say, twenty . . ."

There was a moment's silence when Cokayne had finished reading the fragment. Then Appleby, who had been listening with a curiously strained attention, took back the paper. "Well," he asked, "does this this sound as if it's Miss Hatt who's for the Old Bailey?"

"No . . . it doesn't." Cokayne spoke hesitantly, as if his mind were groping its way into a new situation. "It sounds like something quite different."

"And that is?"

"Insanity!" Cokayne came out with the word vehemently. "Ivor Macrae could never turn into a calculating criminal—but he might, I suppose, turn into a madman. We can all testify that he is an intersely highly-strung intellectual type, who might conceivably——"

"Quite so." Appleby cut this short almost harshly. "The question is where are we now? What happens to a man who writes this"— and he tapped the paper—"proceeds to act on it lethally, and then, on retrieving it, tosses it carelessly to the side of a feeble fire?"

Cokayne produced a handkerchief and nervously dabbed at his lips and forehead. "It's too horrible. It's an abomination. And that poor girl to whom he's engaged! But there's only one answer to your question. A man in that position has no future. And he'd be very mad indeed if he didn't know it."

"But you'd call this whole notion of Dr. Macrae's wrongfully holding on to family property a bit crazy?"

"I know nothing about the rights and wrongs of the matter. But, looking at it in the light of what's happened, I can see that Ivor has been quite irrationally obsessed with it. . . . I suppose a search is being organised?"

"Not yet. But it will be, within the next ten minutes." Appleby spoke grimly. "And I think

that—dead or alive—we'll find Ivor Macrae quite soon."

"If I can give any help, I'll be glad. Miss Hatt has my telephone number."

"Thank you." Appleby, as if he had lost interest in Charles Cokayne, was already moving towards the door, with the charred letter held sightly out before him. It was almost as if he felt it to be in the strictest sense a clue, which his hand must follow if he was to gain the heart of the labyrinth.

Colin Macrae, Miss Hatt and Joyce Hereward were together in a large, bleak drawing-room at the front of the house. If it wasn't cheerful, at least it didn't harbour a corpse. The two women were conversing in low tones, and Colin was moodily turning the pages of a weekly paper. The young girl sprang to her feet as soon as Appleby entered. "Is there any news?"

"No—but it isn't news that's needed, Miss Hereward. It's some piece of logical inference—probably perfectly simple in itself—that I just haven't got round to." As he made this candid report, Appleby moved restlessly acros sthe room. "Mr. Macrae, what do you thing of that fellow Cokayne?"

"I d-d-don't like him." The answer was prompt.

"Then you'll be glad to know I've discovered something he may have difficulty in accounting for. Unfortunately it seems inconsequent. It just doesn't fit in with . . . this." And Appleby tossed his letter on the table. "By the way, you'd better read the whole of it."

Colin Macrae threw down his weekly and moved over to read the letter. "I c-c-can't believe it," he said.

For a moment the two men looked at the fragmentary letter in silence. And then Appleby stiffened. "I can!" he exclaimed. "I believe I can—at last."

"You mean you know what h-happened?"

"I think I do. I think the explanation may have been—well, under your very nose not long ago. Just let me take a look——" Appleby broke off as the door opened and a police sergeant came hurriedly into the room. "Yes?"

"We've lost our man, sir." The sergeant was rueful. "He was on the drive, and must have tumbled to what was happening, and taken alarm at it. We think he slipped into the shrubbery and doubled back towards the river. One of our constables says he heard someone trying to start up a motor launch there."

"That's bad." Appleby wasted no further time in recrimination, but turned to Colin Macrae. "You keep a launch here yourselves?"

"Yes—and it's in g-g-good or-

der. I w-was out in it this afternoon.'

"If we can get it moving within three or four minutes, we've some chance of averting a tragedy. Lead the way."

And they all tumbled from the room. But Appleby—rather surprisingly—spared seconds to sweep up a pile of newspapers and periodicals that lay on a window-seat. He was still clutching these as he doubled across the lawn.

Ivor Macrae's launch had vanished; it seemed plain that somebody had made his escape in it. But there appeared to be a chance that he was not yet far away, since the sound of an engine could just be heard fading down the river. The fugitive—Appleby thought grimly as he watched Colin unlock a boat-house—was doing rather more than just bolting. In fact he was still out to win. And that had meant an operation—at which Appleby could at last pretty confidently guess—by which his departure had been hazardously delayed. But if he now succeeded in doing what he was minded to do, he might yet get away with a lot. For it mightn't be very easy to prove——"

Colin's launch glided to the landing-stage and Appleby jumped in. Joyce Hereward did the same, and there was no time to expostulate. The engine roared and the vessel leapt forward. In the same instant Colin switched on a powerful search-light in its bow, and a long reach of the river before them flashed into view. Here and there were the dim lights of vessels moored or anchored, and a few crafts were still cruising through the soft summer night. Their own speed increased; a long curling wake was flying out from their stern; now and then Appleby thought he could hear indignant shouts. No doubt they were causing a sort of disturbance that the Thames Conservancy Board wouldn't much care for. But it wasn't a moment for worrying about that.

"Ten minutes!" Bending slightly forward, Colin was shouting in Appleby's ear. "We'll b-b-be up with him inside that."

Appleby nodded, and felt in his pocket for a torch. Switching it on, and wedging himself securely against a thwart, he began rapidly to sort through his bundle of papers and journals. He caught Joyce Hereward staring at him in astonishment. "All right!" he called to her. "I'm pretty sure. But I just want to be certain. . . . Ah!" He had found what he wanted, and within a couple of seconds he appeared to be satisfied. "Really simple—as all truly devilish plans are." He glanced at her with compassion. "I'm afraid there's—well, a crisis ahead. It will

come when that launch passes under the first bridge."

"But that's almost at once! The railway——"

Colin Macrae gave a shout. "There he is! But he's crazy. He'll k-kill himself and——"

"The bridge!" Joyce Hereward was pointing forward. Appleby could now see, first, the fugitive launch, leaping and swerving madly on the surface of the river; and then, dimly and uncertainly beyond, two stone arches. A moment later the leading launch had plunged beneath one of them, seeming to miss by a hair's breadth the massive central pier. And in the same instant something could be seen hurled overboard.

Colin had cut out his engine, and their own speed was slackening. Appleby got to his feet, scanning the surface of the water. "There!" he cried—and dived. And even as he hit the water, he knew that the girl—as if prompted by some flash of intuition—had dived too.

When Colin Macrae, having lost sufficient speed to turn, swept back up river, it was to find Appleby and Joyce Hereward supporting in the water the inert body of a young man. With a good deal of difficulty, they were all got on board.

"Is he——?" The girl, kneeling in a puddle in the launch, looked imploringly at Appleby as he presently knelt beside the unconscious figure of Ivor Macrae.

And Appleby smiled. "A little the worse for wear, Miss Hereward. But he's decidedly alive—and a perfectly innocent and honourable man."

Miss Hatt, not having been in at what was so nearly the death of Ivor, had to be given explanations next day.

"You remember the charred letter?" Appleby asked. "In it, the writer described himself as a man who couldn't make up his mind. Now, who is famous for just that?"

"Hamlet." Miss Hatt answered without a moment's desitation.

"Precisely. And the simple explanation of the whole thing ought to have jumped at me at once. But it didn't—until, in the drawing-room last night, I saw Colin happening to turn over a copy of a weekly-paper: *The New Spokesman.* And then I remembered. Ivor was in the habit of doing the competitions in that sort of paper. So I grabbed a pile of recent ones as I ran for that launch. And this is what I found, in the last *Spokesman* but one. Listen." And Appleby read:

> "Prince Hamlet, having set the players to present *The Murder of Gonzago* and thus neatly caught the conscience of the king, unfortunately falls a prey to hysteria and loses

his grip of the situation. A prize of two guineas is offered for a letter addressed by the Prince to his uncle at this point cogently arguing that the game is up and he had better abdicate quietly."

Miss Hatt needed only a second to consider. "Cokayne found Ivor's unfinished attempt at the competition?"

"Just that. And he saw that it could be passed off as an incriminating letter from Ivor to *his* uncle, which would fit neatly into this bit of trouble about family property. That gave him his idea."

But what was his motive?"

"You set me on the track of that yourself. Dr. Macrae and Ivor were on the verge of perfecting a valuable chemical process, and Cokayne was their chief assistant. If he could liquidate both of them he would be able, after a discreet interval, to come forward with it as his own. I noticed that when I mentioned this piece of research to him, he at once played it down. His cunning was notable all the way through. He professed that it was you he suspected, and he gave Ivor a high character—while at the same time starting the notion that he might be subject to serious mental disturbance. But his real flair was for timing. His mouse-trap was a much more intricate affair than Hamlet's. And it almost came off pat."

Miss Hatt considered. "His first job was to get Ivor and yourself on-stage at just the right moment?"

"Precisely. . . . And while getting Ivor with a false message was comparatively easy, the getting me out here was tricky. The request was so queer—so cool, you might say—that I rather surprised myself by agreeing to it."

"Why did he have to have you at all, Sir John?"

"He wanted an expert who wouldn't miss that letter planted in the fireplace. And, of course, the notion of Dr. Macrae's sending an alarmed appeal to the police was a useful one. What he didn't reckon on was my hearing Dr. Macrae's real voice on your dictaphone. I felt at once it didn't square with the voice on the telephone. There was a moment when I thought of Colin Macrae as having conceivably sent that, but I at once realised that his stammer ruled him out as impersonating his uncle. Then when Cokayne rang up and I took the call, I had an obscure feeling that here the actual voice might be. But it was only when I'd got Cokayne to read the letter aloud that I was certain. It was my first important discovery. Cokayne was deeply, although still quite obscurely, implicated.

"And now, consider the sequence of events. Ivor arrived by launch and went up to his uncle's study, where you saw him. The uncle and nephew were at cross-purposes — and what you heard, of course, was Dr. Macrae denying that he had sent any summons. But before they got any further, Cokayne, lurking in the garden, gave his dramatic shout for help. Ivor dashed out, while Dr. Macrae, being crippled, stayed put. Cokayne stunned Ivor, returned to the study, shot Dr. Macrae, and planted the letter. Then he returned to Ivor, and hauled him down to the river. His plan was to take him away in his own craft and stage a suicide by drowning. But it had to be near a bridge."

"A bridge?" Miss Hatt, although so acute, was at a loss here.

"Because of that blow on Ivor's head. It must appear that he had thrown himself down from a height, and hit a pier or buttress. And now there was a first hitch: Joyce Hereward. Her presence in the launch was the unexpected factor. So Cokayne hauled Ivor into the shadow, tied him up, and waited. And the wait was his undoing. He became nervous and felt as criminals so often do—that he must have a look at the scene of the crime and make sure that all was going according to plan there. So he hurried home and made that odd call about being uneasy. He certainly *was* uneasy. Then he waited a little longer, and came up to the house. The discovery that the girl was now there, and the launch therefore deserted, gave him fresh confidence. So he played his part very well."

"He certainly did. But he must have been on tenderhooks to get away."

"Quite so. And he must have made a shrewd guess that he'd be watched, and that the position was pretty desperate. But if he could just get Ivor where he still wanted him, he had a chance of pulling the thing off even now. There was still that damning letter. But he failed."

Miss Hatt was silent for a moment. "We are to be faced with the horrors of a murder trial?"

"No." Appleby shook his head seriously. "You haven't heard the end. After hurling Ivor overboard, Cokayne lost his nerve completely. As a result, he smashed the launch to matchwood against the next bridge, and was drowned. The engineer —as Hamlet, once more, has it— was hoist with his own petard."

revenge

by Andrew Garve

GUY LUNT tied up his smart motor cruiser Seasprite at the quay of the West Country harbour and went ashore to get stores. He was a handsome man of 30, with a well-heeled, carefree look. His appearance was misleading. In fact he was worried—and about money.

His problem was how to make ends meet till his former companions, Gurney and Franks, came out of jail. In particular, how to raise enough cash to pay the instalments on the cruiser. He knew he'd no chance of pulling off a lucrative job single-handed—smuggling was a tough racket and you needed a reliable crew.

He missed Gurney and Franks badly—and it would be four months before they came out. Damn bad luck all round.

His thoughts went back to the disastrous March trip. There'd been four of them then—himself and Gurney and Franks, and a new man named Jim Haines, a dour middle-aged fisherman from up the coast. They'd taken Haines because he had a boat and Seasprite was in dock with gearbox trouble. Gurney had

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"The ever-inventive Andrew Garve," to quote Anthony Boucher, writing in the New York Times Book Review, here tells what happens when a man feels he has reason enough to at long last "act" . . . Mr. Garve is the author of 17 mystery novels including THE PRISONER'S FRIEND (Harper's), FONTEGO'S FOLLY, A HERO FOR LEANDA, THE GOLDEN DEED, etc.

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met him in a pub and talked him into it.

Everything had gone fine until they'd been a mile from home. Then, out of a thick night, had come a challenge from a revenue launch. Their chances had seemed slight. In a patch of fog, they'd decided to split up. Gurney and Franks had taken to the dinghy—and by sheer mischance had blundered straight into the launch and been caught.

Haines had stuck to his boat and Lunt had stayed with him. For a while they'd played hide-and-seek in the fog.

Then, as the launch had approached again, there'd come the tragedy. A lurch, a slippery deck—and Haines had gone overboard. Later Lunt had learned that he'd managed to reach shore but had died in hospieal next day. Which was just as well. Lunt thought. because otherwise he might have talked and given me away. A new, untried man . . .

Gurney and Franks, of course had kept mum. They were trustworthy. So Lunt had come out of it all right. He'd succeeded in beaching Haines's boat and getting away unseen. So he was still free, with nothing against him, and Seasprite ready for a trip. But meanwhile there was the problem of payments . . .

That evening, as Lunt was sipping whisky in his cockpit, a man appeared out of the darkness of the quay and stood looking down.

"Nice boat," he commented.

Lunt exchanged some words with him, at first without much interest. Then, gradually, his interest grew.

The man was young and tough-looking and it turned out, a seafarer. He had a powerful launch of his own which he used for lobster potting and in the summer for taking visitors out. Neither venture, Lunt gathered, was paying too well. In fact the young man, whose name was Jones, seemed to have a financial problem too.

Lunt wondered how he'd fancy a run to Cherbourg. He invited him aboard for a drink and cautiously sounded him out.

Jones, it soon appeared, had no moral objections to smuggling, but he thought it too risky for what you got out of it. "If we want quick dough there's a better way," he said.

"What's that?"

"Salvage. Last summer I towed in a yacht that was in distress. Got three hundred quid."

"I dare say—but you don't find a yacht in trouble just when you want to."

Jones grinned. "This boat insured?"

"You bet."

"How much for?"

"Three thousand."

"There you are them. You take a trip up the coast when there's an onshore wind blowing. I happen to be around, tending my pots. You fix your engine so that it conks. You're on a lee shore in rough sea and if you strike there's not a hope for you. I throw you a line and tow you in. I claim one-third of the value as salvage. A thousand quid. And we split it . . . Can't go wrong."

"There'd be an inquiry," Lunt said.

"So what? No one's seen us together. No one will if we're careful. Why should they suspect anything?"

"They'd check up on the engine failure, and find water in the petrol. That could happen on any boat."

Lunt grunted. "We'd have to make it all look genuine. Someone might have glasses on us. A coastguard . . ."

"We'd choose a place away from coastguards. Off Black Rock, say, six miles up the coast . . . Any rate, we *would* make it look genuine . . . I tell you, mate, we can't go wrong."

Lunt poured more whiskey. "Let's look at the chart," he said.

They had to wait 72 hours for the right weather. Then a southerly wind, force 5, was forecast for the following day. They completed their plans in the darkness of the quay.

Lunt left at three o'clock next afternoon. The sea was uncomfortable, but safe enough away from the shore. Lunt cruised along slowly, looking out for the launch. Naturally he wouldn't tamper with his engine until Jones showed up.

By four he was approaching the rendezvous. Presently he spotted the launch, coming from the opposite direction. Everything was going according to plan. He steered Seasprite inshore till she was only three cables from the rocks. Soon he decided the launch was near enough for him to cut the engine safely.

He took the cap off the petrol tank and poured in a little water. Then he went below and dismantled the carburetor. That would show he'd been doing his best. Back on deck, he waved his shirt as a distress signal.

The launch turned towards him. Lunt watched the rocks. They were very close and the wind was dead on shore. But the timing was perfect. The launch closed in and stopped. Jones waved encouragingly from his foredeck, and threw a rope.

Lunt caught the coil—then stared at it in dismay. It was old and worn. "That's no bloody use!" shouted.

"It's all I've got," Jones called

back. "Make it fast."

Lunt tied it. Jones pulled away. There was a twang, and the rope parted.

Lunt gazed in panic at the closing shore. No time now to reassemble the carburetor.

"You'll have to take me off, Jones," he yelled.

The launch came alongside—but not close enough for Lunt to jump. Jones's face was as hard as the rocks.

"My name isn't Jones," he said, It's Haines! My father was Jim Haines—remember him? I was with him in the hospital when he died. He told me what happened. How you jerked him off the deck and didn't even slow down. He told me your name and your boat. So I found you. You meant to kill him, didn't you? . . . Well, now I'm going to kill you. So long—see you in hell."

The launch sheered away. Lunt called in a cracked voice: "For God's sake. Jones—you've got it all wrong. I can tell you what happened. . ."

But before he could think of a story, the cruiser struck.

NEXT MONTH –

THE MAN WHO CHOSE THE DEVIL
by RICHARD DEMING

THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 17th
by CORNELL WOOLRICH

MUTED HUNGER
by JUDITH MERRIL

CASE OF S. W. 2
by JULIAN SYMONS

FIVE O'CLOCK MENACE
by BRUNO FISCHER

and

THE RUSSIAN PRISONER

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the October issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE IMAGEMAKER

Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy recently introduced the New York Police Department's "Imagemaker" — a scientific method of identification of crime suspects by swift rendition and projection of eyewitness descriptions. The new method streamlines the former timeconsuming procedure used by police artists in preparing sketches of wanted persons. This is done through the use of special mirrors, electrically operated and remotely controlled, which flash changing images on a screen until, in a matter of minutes, the image coincides with the witness' memory of a particular face.

The "Imagemaker"was invented by Detective Peter Smith of the Bureau of Criminal Identification, who devoted more than 3,000 hours of his own time in experiments and improvements of the device, which is being patented. The "Imagemaker" combines the best features of the overlay system, plus the manual skills of the police artist. Officially known as the Variable Image Reflector, it is an electro-mechanically operated and remotely controlled machine, consisting of a top loading projector with specially fabricated slide holder; a front surface mirror selected for its special reflective properties; a flexible mirror; a projection screen and a set of overlay slides each containing related facial parts. A Polaroid camera is also used with the device to take pictures of the final image. The "Imagemaker" will be used in conjunction with the newly adopted electronic data processing equipment — more popularly known as the "Mugg-a-Minute Machine" — to further enhance and broaden the scope, speed and accuracy of the identification processes so vital to law enforcement.

In the last several years, the police artist's ability to create a sketch from an oral description has become more and more effective in the field of identification. As a result, demands for this service have increased. However, the skill of a suitable artist is sometimes hard to find within the ranks of a police department and, even if available, a considerable period of training is required to make him efficient at this specialized task. This is a particularly difficult field because the artist sketches not from a model, but from a verbal image presented by the incident in which he was involved, or is even reluctant to cooperate with police. The very necessary talent of the police artist then is his ability to extract sufficient accurate data from a witness and then transmit this to a created sketch. With the introduction of the "Imagemaker," the Police Department will now be able to use other members of the force with a minimum of training on this type of identification work. The necessary requirement will be not artistic skill, but the ability to translate a witness' statements to a code sheet which, in effect, becomes the instruction for the creation of the image.

The image is built on the "Imagemaker" in the following manner: A witness is interviewed and a description obtained and recorded on a code sheet. The code sheet directs the operator to the appropriate slides which are inserted as a group into the projector. The projector transmits an image to the front surface mirror which, in turn, reflects it back to the flexible mirror and the latter flashes an image to the screen. By use of stress on the flexible mirror caused by pressure from the eight electric motors, the image can be adjusted to fit the witness' memory of the unknown person.

This entire process takes about twenty minutes in contrast to a manual sketch which takes from three hours up to a day to create.

It is important to note that the sketch is not offered as a studio portrait of the suspect but rather as a visual aid containing sufficient resemblance of an unknown person or perpetrator.

The SAINT in Modern Art - II

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

Our recent feature under this heading, illustrated with "Saint" drawings by Jean Cocteau, not unnaturally evoked some response from other aspirants to similar notice.

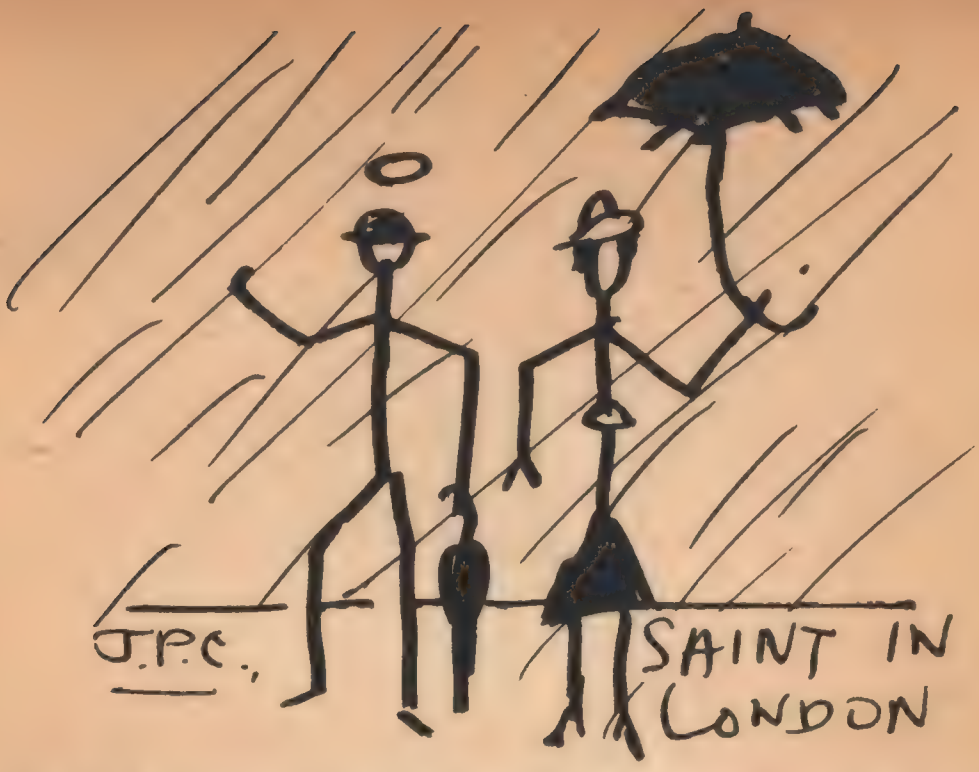
The first of these was our occasional contributor Harry Harrison, who was once a comic strip artist, who sent in the whimsical and instantly recognizable caricature of himself in stick-figure form which is reproduced here (at the left).

A more serious claimant to recognition was John Paddy Carstairs, whose versatility has a breadth rather similar to Cocteau's. The son of one of England's most famous comedians of a former generation, he deliberately refused to trade on the celebrity of his father's name, Nelson Keys, and instead adopted the name of Carstairs under which to launch himself on not one but three careers, in all of which he has made a success which most people would be satisfied to achieve in one.

As a movie-maker, he has directed some dozens of commercially successful British pictures, among which it is interesting to include **The Saint in London**, which was made in England by RKO. And at the time of writing he is busy directing some of the Saint television pictures which are now in production.

As an author, he has written 32 novels, of which four were crime adventures, and a flock of short stories, as a sample of which we are offering **The Late Lamented Queen**, which appears elsewhere in this issue.

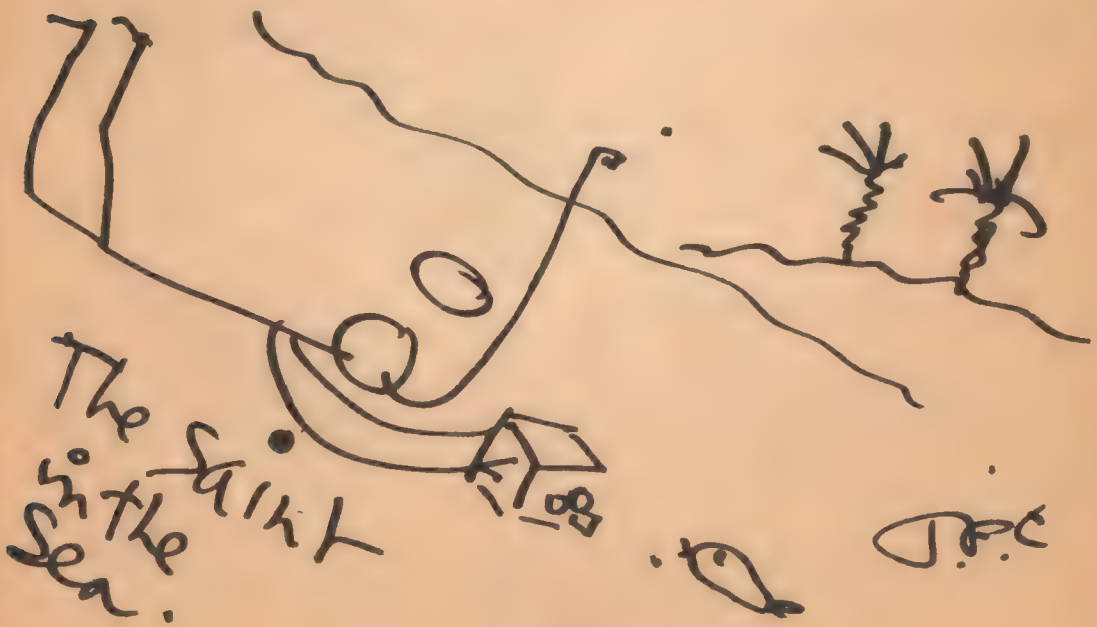
As a participant in the last war, he served in the Royal Navy, and attained the rank of lieutenant-commander in the Fleet Air Arm.



As a kind of human dynamo who cannot sit still for more than a few minutes, even in what one must laughingly call his spare time, he has been a student and dilettante in a frightening list of diversions ranging from judo to jazz.

As an artist, he studied at the Slade School, and before long attained with what seems like deceptively effortless ease the ultimate European accolades of having his paintings exhibited both by London's Royal Academy and the Paris Salon. Dashing off works of art with a frenzied speed and energy which have to be seen to be believed, he also turns out enough canvases for a regular one-man show of his own in one of London's important galleries.

And as a ceaseless if sometimes illegible correspondent, he adorns his letters to me with his own variations on the Saint figure, of which we bring you these samples.



a puzzle for sister julia

by Dan Ross

IN ALL the years she had been Mother Superior of Mount St. Francis Convent and Principal of the Mount St. Francis Business School, Sister Julia had not known a moment as shocking as this one. Sitting behind her desk in her office with her personal secretary, Sister Clare, at her side she listened to the sombre words of Detective Inspector Hawkins, her placid middle-aged face registering grief and amazement.

"I find it hard to understand that anyone would do such a thing, Inspector," she said in her soft, precise voice. "Mary Ellen was such a lovely girl. She was a student here for two years. Always an outstanding girl in her studies and she told me she'd found a very good job."

Stoutish and balding Inspector Hawkins nodded. "She did. I'm sorry to bother you with this unpleasantness, Sister. But I hoped you might be able to fill in some background details that might help us."

Sister Julia folded her thin hands and stared down at them from behind her gold-rimmed

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W. E. D. Ross, Canadian novelist and short-story writer, will be remembered by readers of this magazine for his sensitive THE THREE THIEVES (SMM, Febr. 1962) and for his Mei Wong stories. Now, with the present story, the first in a new series, we meet the formidable Mother Superior, Sister Julia. . . .

Originally published in the June 1962 issue of Our Family, of Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. Reprinted by permission of Rev. A. A. Hubenig, OMI, Editor, and the author.

glasses. "No. I'm afraid I can't. But if you'd be so kind as to go over it again. Something might come to me."

The Inspector sighed and noting the troubled face of Sister Clare, standing back of her Superior, began his story a second time.

"Mary Ellen had made a good many friends in the city. There were two young men of whom she seemed especially fond, Bill Chalmers, who worked in her office and a young lawyer, David Walker. David Walker asked her to marry him and she promised him an answer.

"On the afternoon of the yacht regatta she went to a small town along the shore where a good view could be had of the yachts as they came by. Her companion for the excursion was David Walker, the young lawyer who wanted to marry her. He says that she told him she'd let him know after she'd talked to the other beau, Bill Chalmers. Later in the afternoon Chalmers drove by the beach where they were and joined them. At least so Walker claims, there are no other witnesses. Mary Ellen told Walker she wanted to talk to Bill Chalmers alone and suggested he return to the city and that she would come back later with Bill and phone him then."

Sister Julia looked up at the Inspector. "But she never did?"

"That's right, Sister," the Inspector went on. "She didn't return at all. A search was made and her body found in the water. At first we thought she'd drowned. But an autopsy showed she was dead before being in the water—a blunt object, a stone or heavy piece of wood had been used to kill her."

"And what about this Bill Chalmers with whom she was left?" Sister Julia asked.

"That's the strange part of it, Sister," the Inspector frowned. "He insists he didn't go near the beach that afternoon nor did he see Walker or the girl. He'd gone off for a drive in his car without stopping anywhere."

Sister Julia gave a meaningful look in Sister Clare's direction. "You see," she explained, "the young man has no alibi." Then to the Inspector she said: "I'm quite familiar with these things. I'm an avid reader of the Father Brown stories and the mysteries of the late Msgr. Knox."

Inspector Hawkins grew red in the face. "I'm afraid we have no such specialists on the local force. But we have turned up evidence that Chalmers is lying. David Walker took a picture of him and the girl before he left them. He makes a hobby of photography. Here it is." He passed the snapshot to Sister Julia.

She studied the picture of the smiling girl and the young man at her side. She made a mourn-

ful sound. "Poor dear! How happy she seems. And that nice young man—he doesn't look like a murderer."

Sister Clare peered timidly over her shoulder and murmured: "He has a strong face."

"You see!" Sister Julia looked at the Inspector triumphantly. "Sister agrees with me. Are you sure you aren't wrongly accusing the young man? This picture could have been taken at some other time."

The Inspector shook his head. "No, not possible. You will notice a yacht in the background. It is decorated and we can tell by those decorations. They were done only the morning the snapshot was taken. So that settles the time."

Sister Julia returned the snapshot to him. "I'm still not convinced."

The Inspector coughed uncomfortably. "Feminine intuition is a strong force, Sister. And I respect it but I think it is leading you astray this time. Young Walker gave us this picture and we're holding Chalmers on the basis of this evidence."

"Such a pity," Sister Julia said. "But I'm sure you must know best."

After the Inspector left Sister Julia tried to concentrate on the routine of the day but her mind was still on the dreadful fate of Mary Ellen. All that day and much of the next she found herself vaguely troubled as if she'd forgotten something. Then she suddenly realized what it was.

Turning to Sister Clare she said: "Sister, get police headquarters for me."

Sister Clare stared in innocent surprise. But Sister Julia waved a hand. "I know what I'm doing. This happens in most of the detective stories."

When the Inspector came to the phone Sister Julia asked: "Have there been any new developments?"

"Nothing," Inspector Hawkins was polite if not too interested. "Have you anything further to offer?"

"Not really. But I would like you to come by the Convent when it is convenient. I'm terribly disturbed by this thing."

"I'll be along your way within the hour," the Inspector told her.

When Sister Julia hung up the phone she sat back in her chair with a sigh. Young Sister Clare regarded her with mild astonishment. "Have you really any ideas about the case?" she asked.

Sister Julia glanced up at her, the mild eyes behind the glasses mirroring her troubled thoughts. "There is something—something I feel sure of it. But I just can't pinpoint it. Perhaps it will come to me later."

"It will be hard to catch the guilty one," Sister Clare observed. "Murderers are so clever."

"On the contrary," Sister Julia

told her. "They are not clever or they would not be murderers in the first place. Persons of such limited or twisted intelligence nearly always make some mistake."

Sister Clare nodded. "You have read so much about these things, Sister."

Sister Julia was staring off in space. "The thing is to hit the blunder. I have a feeling I've missed something important." Then her mood changing she smiled at her secretary. "How did things go in school today?"

"Very well," Sister Clare seemed relieved at the change of subject. "The class enjoyed their art lesson. I discussed Leonardo's painting of Gethsemane. You remember we saw it last summer at the exhibition in the Raydown Art Gallery."

"Of course we did," Sister Julia agreed. "A fine piece of work.' And then her expression underwent a quick change. She glanced at Sister Clare in surprise. "You know you've helped me. I think I have an idea what it was I overlooked when the Inspector was here."

Not long after Inspector Hawkins presented himself at the Convent office. He smiled politely. "Well, Sister?"

She glanced up at him with alert eyes. "I hope you've brought that snapshot along. I still don't think it is enough to prove the Chalmers boy guilty."

The Inspector produced the snapshot with a sigh. "It's pretty solid evidence."

Sister Julia examined the picture of the late Mary Ellen and the smiling Bill Chalmers once again. "Of course that's what bothered me!" she exclaimed. "Do you notice that the young man is holding some sort of folder in his right hand?"

The Inspector studied the snapshot. "Looks like a paper. Couldn't be important!"

"But it is! I'd like an enlargement of this snapshot, Inspector Hawkins. Could you arrange that for me?"

He cleared his throat. "I suppose so, but ——"

"You think I want to play detective," Sister Julia smiled sadly. "I guess I do. Mary Ellen was a dear girl. I loved her. And I want to see the guilty person pay for his crime."

Later that afternoon, a puzzled Inspector Hawkins returned to the convent with an enlargement of the snapshot. He put it on Sister's desk with a glum: "There you are. It's not a paper he's holding with a date or anything. It's a program. You can see the letters RAY on it."

"Certainly!" Sister Julia got up. "I recognized that program even in the small snap. It was put out by the Raydon Art Gallery. I attended the special exhibition with our art instructor, Sister Clare. I have an identical

program here."

"I don't follow this," the Inspector scowled. "What would Chalmers be doing with a year old program in his hand, unless —"

"Unless," Sister Julia prompted, "the photo of him was not taken at the beach. Couldn't it have been one snapped of him last year outside the art gallery. The background of the shore would be almost identical. And you mentioned, I seem to remember, that this David Walker is a photo hobbyist."

The Inspector's round, florid face was filled with interest. "If you'll excuse me, Sister, I'll look into this."

Early that evening a phone call came for Sister Julia. The Inspector was very excited. "You were right, Sister. That picture of Chalmers was taken when he and Walker attended the art exhibition together last year. They were close friends before they became rivals for Mary Ellen."

Sister Julia spoke in a near whisper. "So Walker's story was untrue!"

"Yes. He had the negative of this old snapshot of Chalmers and he also had taken one of Mary Ellen shortly before the quarrel on the afternoon of the murder. To give himself an alibi and put the blame on Chalmers he used the two negatives to rig up a double exposure of them together. He's confessed to the whole awful business. We owe you a great deal of thanks, Sister."

But Sister Julia hardly heard his praise. She hung up the receiver and stood alone in the shadows of the Convent reception hall. Her lips moved silently as her fingers touched her Rosary and she offered a prayer for Mary Ellen and the unfortunate who had so lost himself to become her killer.

PRISON CORRESPONDENCE, WORMWOOD SCRUBS

Under standing orders at both Wormwood Scrubs and Dartmoor, in England, letters written by prisoners may not contain:

(a) "Discussion of methods of committing crime, instigation of criminal offences," attempts to suborn witnesses or tamper with evidence, or attempts "to facilitate escapes."

(b) "Complains about the courts and the police which are deliberately calculated to hold the authorities up to contempt."

(c) .Threats of violence.

(d) Information intended for the newspapers.

(e) "Grossly improper language."

(f) "Attempts to stimulate public agitation about matters other than the prisoner's own conviction and sentence." In other words, there is no point in complaining to your Member of Parliament. It is extremely unlikely that he will receive the letter.

the late lamented queen

by John Paddy Carstairs

THE "HIDE-OUT" was the first floor front room above Santonilli's Cafe. It was convenient and the good thing about it was that the gang could stroll into Santonilli's as if going in for a meal, and walk straight through to a back stairway. Santonilli was well paid for the room and asked no questions. In the room were a few chairs, rickety now, because the gang were in the habit of putting their feet up on the mantelpiece or table, and balancing on the back legs of the chairs; a kitchen table, hacked and chipped with knife cuts; a wash-stand and basin, the latter, an insipid yellow, cracked and sad-looking, and, in a corner of the room, there was a camp-bed. No carpets, no pictures, no comfort could be found in that room. It was the sort of room from which you made a get-away, leaving (you hoped) no traces, no clues.

The gang comprised the Captain, tall, hard-looking, thoughtful; Mo', a quick-witted man with no neck to speak of, big-shouldered, with a broken nose and an appreciation of good

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John Paddy Carstairs is the author of 32 novels (including four mysteries) and of many short stories. He has directed several dozen films including, some years ago, THE SAINT IN LONDON, and now some of the films about the Saint produced in England for TV and now to be seen in this country. His paintings have been exhibited both at the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon.

music; Charlie, who was fair and tough and sarcastic, he had beady eyes and a brutal mouth; Leslie, who was little, dark, with a keen face and quick, bird-like movements. He looked intelligent but nervy. He kept his eyes on the move and twitched occasionally. Charlie and Leslie were always quarrelling, they were contrasting crooks—Charlie was the pug-ugly, the thug who grabbed, Leslie used his brains and his education. Charlie loathed Leslie for his education. They had all gone downhill—Mo' had evaded Army call-up for two years; Charlie was in the smash-and-grab racket originally; the Captain had done very nicely out of the Black Market and Leslie had been a weak man about town, sponger, a wet, but he knew where a lot of ladies kept their furs. The Captain (a Sergeant, if the truth were told) knew his value to the organization. The Captain, Charlie, Mo', and Leslie; brains, brawn, craftiness, agility; they did quite well for minor crooks. Just now they were awaiting the return of the Captain who was 'doin' a bit of recce work'. Mo' had sent down for a plate of spaghetti and was eating, noisily and with relish. Leslie lay on the camp-bed reading, what the dust cover called, "a romantic period piece". Charlie sat on a chair with his feet up on the mantelpiece, pretending to file his finger nails. He had thick, ungainly fingers, and he cut the nails with a cutter. He cut them very short and there was no chance of filing them, but he noticed that gangsters in the films always filed their nails when they were "sticking around for the Boss", and Charlie was dumb enough to want to have glamour, even if it was only to satisfy Charlie. When the Captain burst in and the moment of tension, of pent-up excitement had subsided (for none of them failed to have the heart thumps when the door burst open, the newcomer *might* be a Divisional Inspector), the Captain, who had gone to the table, taken a rough map from his pocket and laid it on the table top and sat studying it intently, called to the other three who watched and waited for his:

"Come here, boys!"

"Got it, Captain?"

"Yeah, the complete layout!"

"What's it this time?" Leslie put his "romantic period piece" down and left the camp-bed to cross to the table. He had been "up at one of his clubs" to spend his whack of the last little job (a lightning smash-and-grab in a small provincial town which had been very successful) and

hadn't heard the Captain's new scheme.

"Prayer book. Scare yer?" Jeered Charlie. His eyes dropped to Leslie's old school tie. The irritating thing to Charlie was that Leslie was probably entitled to wear it.

"Prayer Book?" Leslie echoed in surprise.

"Pipe down, Charlie. I'll do the talkin'!"

"Right-you-are, Captain." Charlie was like a cowed Alsatian when the Captain rapped at him.

"Now, I don't think I missed a trick!" The Captain said thoughtfully.

"Go by motor bike, Captain?" Mo' asked, finishing his spaghetti.

"Yes. Parked it at the Red Lion, centre of the village. Joined the charabanc crowd as they stepped out of the 'charry', walked along to the Manor —"

"What Manor, Captain?" Leslie enquired.

"Marshton Manor."

"Marshton Manor! Anne Boleyn lived there once."

"That's right, clever dick! Now tell us something else we don't know!"

"What happened, Captain?" Mo' asked.

"Smooth as butter! I mixed with 'em as the guide took us round. We'll need waders for the moat, that's the tricky part —that's when you'll be useful, Charlie—you'll have to have Leslie on your shoulders to make the wall—it's ruddy high. You'll change your shoes—gym shoes for you, me boy, when you're across the moat—"

"What'll I be doing?" Mo' enquired.

"Making a ruddy noise round at the west wing."

"Wheres' that?"

"There!" The Captain jabbed his finger on to the map of Marshton Manor. "There's a greenhouse there, you'll break a pane or two at the precise moment Leslie smashes his pane t'other side—only you'll make a noise and Leslie won't."

"Not much 'e won't!" Charlie said.

"Now, I'll be in the get-a-away car here," the Captain pointed to a side lane by the front of the Manor. "But first, I've got to get here to cut the current. Windows have bell warnings."

"What am I after when I'm in?" Leslie asked.

"I told yer, a ruddy prayer book," Charlie said.

"I don't get it."

"You'd better get it!" Charlie growled. 'I'm not going to swim a moat and give you a bunk-up over a fifteen-foot wall for nuffin'!"

"What's the job, Captain?" Leslie asked.

"There's a prayer book, it's got a cover that's full of jewels —a beauty—pearls, diamonds, s a p p h i r e s—God, something, man!"

"Hers?"

"Anne Boleyn's? One of them. That's what the guide said."

"Don't worry, Leslie, you can keep the book, all *we* want is the cover!" said Charlie jocularly.

"Any—anything else?" Leslie asked, hesitating for a moment.

"No. Just the prayer book."

"I know just the cove who'll take pearls and diamonds," Mo' said reflectively, trying to locate a recalcitrant sliver of spaghetti stuck at the gack of his jaw.

"You'd better!" The Captain said grimly.

"Anne Boleyn's prayer book," Leslie muttered.

"What's the matter—superstitious?" Charlie challenged.

"Of course not," Leslie replied quickly.

"I don't hold with you educated crooks!"

"Thanks."

"Pipe down, Charlie. Who did the Enfield job? Got us in with his la-de-da voice?" The Captain said.

" 'E did!" Charlie reluctantly agreed.

"Exactly! We're team, my old mates, and don't forget it!"

"Captain's right," Mo' said.

"Give me all the details, Captain . . . . . ." Leslie began.

"Don't worry, I measured that room as we walked as if I'd had a tape measure."

"Anne Boleyn. Blimey! Wasn't she one of the old girls who lost 'er napper on account of Old 'Enry got bored wiv 'er?" Charlie asked.

"Yes."

"What was it, eight wives 'e 'ad, didn't 'e?"

"Six."

"Oh you would know, wouldn't you, Mister Know-all!"

"Yes. I won prizes at history," Leslie replied.

"Course yer did. Lord Ruddy Fontelroy!"

"Six wives, that's a lot of wives!" Mo' said, thinking how difficult he found it to satisfy his bed-loving Rachel.

"Not at once, you b. f.!" said Charlie. "When 'e got tired of one he lopped 'er 'ead off and 'ad another dive into the lucky dip."

"He beheaded two of them, not six," Leslie corrected him.

"Oh you would know! What did he do with the others—poison 'em?"

"One died, one was divorced and Catherine Parr survived him."

"Know the names, too, don't yer? So do I, there was Annie of Cloves, for one."

"Cleves, Charlie, Cleves."

"An'—an'," Charlie rucked-up

his forehead in thought, "Catherine of 'Arrogate!" He announced brightly.

"Aragon," Leslie corrected, then bit his lip as Charlie continued, winking at Mo', "Bessie from Brighton and one or two others, you'd know 'em, no doubt *and* their ages *and* how many times they—"

"Shut up!" Snapped the Captain. "Now, let's plan . . . "

Listening intently, absorbing all he needed to know, Leslie inwardly cursed Charlie. Charlie was able to make him feel ashamed where a High Court Judge could never bring a blush to his pale cheeks. Charlie thought it was much worse for a crook to be a gentleman, or, at any rate, to have been to a decent school. Yes; it was true he had won a prize for history. Many of them. He loved history. Now he read tripe. "Romantic period pieces." He could do a damn sight better himself; only he couldn't put it on paper. One of Anne Boleyn's prayer books. He was going to swipe it for the gang and he'd be able to saunter into the Mulberry Club and have Black Velvet and think what an out-of-place ox Charlie would look amid such distinguished surroundings. He'd stand Nikko, the barman, a drink, too. Maybe Sonia would be there. He liked Sonia. She reminded him of his sister. Yet, he disliked her too; he'd like to humiliate Sonia. His sister was the reason why he had had to leave school. Indirectly she was. If they hadn't had to pay out for those Swiss sanatorium fees he'd have had more pocket money. Being at one of the best ten schools in England and having no money and watching the others at the Tuck Shop, stuffing ice creams, chocolate bars and buns down their gizzards. Small wonder he swiped that half-crown and the next and the next . . . . . And that dirty trick of putting that indelible muck on the tenth! The stain on his hands. The stain on his character. "I am afraid I must ask your parents to come and take you away, my boy. We don't allow thieves at this Ancient Seat of Learning."

"You got all that?" The Captain asked, bringing him back to the Hide-out.

"Yes."

"Repeat it back to me."

Leslie did so.

"Good."

"Now, Mo'—about your diversion."

"Uh?"

"About the false break-in that you stage—"

"Oh, yeah! Sure! Tell me, Captain."

The Captain told him.

One of Anne Boleyn's prayer books, jewel-encrusted. Perhaps

the one she took to the scaffold! Dates and sayings began to float softly through his mind "Henry VIII, 1509" . . . . "Henry VIII knew a man when he saw one . . . . ." Thomas More's *Utopia* . . . . "If I had served my God as diligently as I have done my King, he would not have given me over in my gray hairs." Wolsey, of course . . . . Field of the Cloth of Gold, now what was the date? 1520?1522? My memory's not so good. The Field of the Cloth of Gold, outside Calais with Henry in all his majesty and who was it now? Francis! That's right, Francis. What a sight! I'd have liked to have been there. You! You'd have probably swiped the Cloth, you public-school thief, you! You swift-fingered crook with the 'Varsity voice! You history-coated crook!

"Any questions?" The Captain asked.

"About that catch on the window . . . . when I break the pane . . . ." Leslie asked.

"Smashin' the way the Captain plans this 'ere thing," Mo' said later, in a low voice full of admiration and bottled stout.

" 'E weren't no Captain for nuffin'!" Charlie said, gulping down his wallop.

Leslie sipped his light ale. Well, it might be Black Velvet in a few hours time . . . they say she wore black velvet at her execution . . . .

The Manor was built near the top of a hill, a short distance from Marshton Village, and dominated the countryside just as the builder intended years ago; a squat, ugly building redeemed by a tower added in Henry VII's reign. It was the Museum room in the tower that housed the Prayer Book. A silver-soft flood of moonlight bathed the Manor in a light more precious than day. The gang, in a little copse, not far from the moat, watched nervously for any signs of activity.

"Blimey, Captain, you couldn't 'ave chosen a lighter night!" Charlie whispered.

"That bunk-up over the wall isn't all Leslie's got to do, it's the tower that's tough," the Captain explained quietly. "he'll need light for that."

"I don't fancy breaking my neck because you don't think it's a dark enough night!" Leslie added, whispering this to Charlie.

"Well, if yer get a giddy fit, don't fall back on me, chum!" Charlie replied surlily.

"Oh, shut up, you two!" Mo' snapped uneasily. "We're a team, see? That's what the Captain says, but you two act like you was married!"

"Quiet, all of you!" The Captain ordered. "When that cloud

gets across the moon we move, an' we move fast. Mo'—you got the scalers?"

"Yes."

"Waders on when we get to that clump of bushes by the moat. Gym shoes round your neck for your crossing, Leslie."

"Yes."

"Now, stand by. Stand by . . . reminds me of Tobruk!"

There was excitement in the Captain's voice. Suddenly quite calmly and without much surprise, Leslie realized that the Captain hadn't been at Tobruk.

"I wish it was over!" Mo' admitted.

"Shut up, now!"

"Steady! Right! Off we go!"

The four men ran noisily across the open ground to the clump of bushes by the moat-side, the darkness causing them to stumble and curse because of it. They reached their cover, panting for breath, frightened, angry with the noise they had made, angry with one another. "Holy mackerel, you —s! What you think this, a Sunday School outing? Fine—noise! Do you want to do a stretch?" The Captain snarled, breathing deeply, nervy, edgy, irritable, jumpy, like the rest of them.

They lay still in an agony of apprehension, trying to control their noisy breathing, trying not to be jittery. Leslie thought 'It's always more frightening doing a job at night. In the daytime it doesn't seem real, but at night it seems real enough. I wish I was sitting on one of those white-topped stools at the Mulberry Club, drinking Black Velvet, with Sonia looking sideways at me, head on one side, provocatively.' The moon came out again and smiled over the land. It gave the Manor a strange, unearthly look.

Charlie thought, 'If any ruddy gamekeeper or rozzer pops his bleeding head up now I'll do the bleeder, I will, straight. I'll do him. Nerves? Me? Don't know what the bleedin' things are. Don't know the meaning of the word!'

Mo' thought, 'Why didn't I learn to play piano like Ma said I should? I might be with Kostelanetz now instead of shivering in a hedge looking at a — castle! "If music be the food of love, play on." Now what made me think of that? Well, you can't play piano unless you can eat an —. Now what made think of that?' He frowned in the darkness, still breathing heavily, then tugged at Leslie's arm.

"Leslie, Les, who said 'If music be the food of love, play on'?" He asked.

"Holy —!" Cursed Charlie. "Anne of Cloves, I expect! What's the matter with you?"

"One of Shakespeare's char-

acters, I think," Leslie whispered.

"I told you educated crooks was no good!" Charlie contended.

"Shut up, all of you!" The Captain, pondering over this extraordinary question from Mo', wondered if Charlie was not perhaps right. What a flaming silly question just when they were going to Do a Job!

"There she goes —!" The Captain began.

"Who? Who?" Mo' interrupted nervously.

"The moon, you dope. Get ready—watches O. K.?"

They checked their luminous-faced watches, neat precision jobs from the Russian zone of occupied Berlin.

"You sure that moat's only two feet deep, Cap'?" Charlie asked uneasily.

"That's what the guide said—too late to worry about it now!"

"But I can't swim!" Charlie declared.

"Too — bad!" Leslie interjected, glad to get his own back; achieving from it a warm glow for a brief moment in an atmosphere that was otherwise icy.

"Let's go!"

Leslie and Charlie ran to the moat and clambered down the bank and began to wade unsteadily through it. Mo' made his way round to the greenhouse. The Captain hurried off to put the warning bells out of action and then would make for the get-away car. If anything went wrong, if they nabbed any of the boys, he was not going to wait, but they did not know that. They did not know that he intended to do that on any of the jobs. He thought it might spoil their work if they knew that.

By the tower wall Leslie was busy taking off his waders and putting on his sneakers.

"See me nearly go for six into that — moat?" Charlie asked.

Leslie nodded. "Wasn't as deep as I thought it would be," he confessed.

"Rocky bottom. Don't know how I kept me balance!" Charlie continued.

"You keep your balance when I'm on your — shoulders!" Leslie said, giving him the adjective he understood and appreciated.

"Come on you little squirt! Ups-a-daisy!" Charlie was almost genial.

The wall was easy. Leslie was up it without much trouble, but the moon came out before he had dropped to the other side and he lay on top of the wall, without moving, praying that he would not be detected. "Now I lay me down to sleep" .... Why did Mo' want to know who said that speech about music? What funny ideas people

got when they were Doing a Job. Wonder what the Captain thinks of? Dames, most probably. Which reminds me, Sonia at the Mulberry Club and a stinking great Black Velvet! . . . . They say she wore black velvet at her execution . . . . "We're off to steal the prayer book, the prayer book of Annie Bo-leyn!" Bible thief! From half-crowns to bibles! We'll blame your weak-chested sister, chum. "A smooth crook with an old school tie"; that was how one paper described him. That's when he went up to the "Gables" door, full of courtesy and a .303 in his left pocket. A smooth crook with an old school tie. I remember walking down the length of the Great Hall to collect my first prize, in an Eton jacket—bum freeezers we called 'em—Lower Fourth B. The Waite-Faversham History Prize, Leslie Alfred Bar—'

"Get off that — wall!" Hissed Charlie from the get-away side.

The moon was 'out' again and Leslie, cautiously looking at the ground, selected his landing spot and dropped lightly into the Manor grounds. He waited. No sound. No lights at any windows. No dogs. Dogs were the devil. He didn't like croaking dogs; but sometimes you had to!

He scaled the ivy-covered tower in moonlight. It was difficult because the ivy kept giving way, but he took no chances, established toe holds for himself before he clutched at any ivy.

He reached the window five minutes ahead of schedule. 'Got to hand it to the Captain, he could organize. Now I must wait to break the window and slip the catch at the same time as Mo' makes his diversionary "attack" on the greenhouse. Hope to goodness the Captain has cut the current. Fine thing if I got burned up having got so far.' He gulped and wondered if he were brave. He wondered if a jury would give him credit for being a brave man if—when —if . . . Three minutes to go. 'Time! A funny thing; sometimes it shot by and you didn't know how it had flashed past so quickly. I wonder how *she* felt—how the time seemed—slow or fast just before dawn on the day they chopped off her head? Henry VIII had six wives, he beheaded two of them. She should have known, she should have been warned by the fate that befell Catherine of Aragon . . . . What do you do for a living, chum? I steal prayer books. Prayer books? That's a rum profession. Well, I've never stolen one before. We do all sorts of Jobs—Smash and Grabs and Confidence works and—Don't you feel uneasy-like, swiping a

prayer book? No, that's superstitious, old wives' stuff, Charlie asked the same question. What's so special about a prayer book, chum? This one is jewel-encrusted, it was Anne Boleyn's they say—"Good grief! What was that?" In his reverie he had forgotten to keep an eye on his watch. That crash! Mo' had crashed the greenhouse! He hadn't synchronized his crash! Fool that he was! He smashed the pane of glass, slipped his hand inside and found the latch shaped just like the rough design the Captain had made for him. In his anxiety to get cracking he forgot to worry about the electric wires. But, in any case, the Captain had put them out of action.

He was in the Museum room, moonlight giving the suits of armour, the glass cases, a dim, eerie look. He stood for a moment, trying to get his bearings, trying to remember all that the Captain had described, trying to remember, was it four paces to the right and left six paces past a row of glass-topped cases, or was it six paces to the left and—Hell!—He wished he had an ice cold brain, he wished he didn't panic! There was a musty atmosphere in the Museum and he felt shivery, in spite of the climb, in spite of the feverish activity of getting in. He switched on his torch, but nothing happened. He shook it, switched it on and off, but no light came on. He cursed. That w o u l d happen. Must have knocked it on the way up. He felt for the spare bulb in his top pocket and withdrew his hand, uttering a sharp little "ouch!" The spare bulb had broken in his pocket and the jagged glass had stabbed his thumb.

He fumbled for his matches; cursing the torch for being broken; cursing the Captain for saying that, on a moonlight, you could see perfectly well in the Museum, c u r s i n g—oh—! He dropped the matches and then stopped still and gasped, then gave a little moan. He found himself standing next to a waxen model, a life-size waxen model of a Cavalier who grinned inanely, feathered hat in hand, covered in fancy cloth decked out with knick-knacks light blue or white, Leslie couldn't tell. God! But the figure had scared him! Where was that prayer book? Where was it? Think, man, think! Four to the left. Hell! He'd taken at least fourteen! Where were the matches? He—what was that? Footsteps? He thought he had heard someone—hurry, man, get the prayer book! The smell in the Museum was a smell of—what? A *smell of death!* Oh glory! Don't say he was losing his nerve? Don't do that, Leslie. Would a jury

say you were brave, chum? Would a—ah! that looked like it! That looked like the prayer book! Her prayer book. He smashed the glass-topped case cover. The little book, frowsier than he had imagined, with jewels that were larger than he imagined but somehow did not glitter and twinkle as he had supposed, lay, with fragments of glass on it; he put his hand out to pick it up and found his thumb was bleeding profusely. The blood dropped on to the prayer book. It made him horribly frightened. He made a grab for the book and he cut his arm on the sharp edge of the broken glass-topped case. His eyes dilated as he heard a voice, a woman's voice say:

"Would you even take that away from me?"

He closed his eyes, not daring to open them. He could feel the perspiration, a sheet of water across his brow, he could feel it trickle in cold rivulets on to his eyes. He could smell his own fear above the musty, fusty, smell of death. He *had* to open his eyes. He had to. When he did so, Anne stood in front of him, dressed in black velvet. She had the prayer book now in her hand and he could see *his* blood upon it.

"Would you even take that away from me?" She repeated.

Her voice, the way she spoke the words was curious, far away, out of this world. He gasped:

"Anne Boleyn!"

"Yes. Poor Anne! I was sixteen when I first flirted with him. Sixteen and I didn't really understand, at first. He vowed he'd have me; but I made him marry me. I made him do that," she said.

"Oh, Anne . . . ."

"When I had a daughter, I knew . . . . the poor Catherine woman had borne him a daughter . . . ."

"Did it, did it hurt?" He found himself asking. He could could also see his blood on her prayer book, his blood covered the bright stones.

"No. It didn't hurt. It was the thought that it would hurt. It was seeing the bright little patch of blue sky the day before and knowing that they were taking that from me. Nothing matters but that. When they take the sky away from you, when they do that . . . . and when you take the Little Book, too. My only comfort . . . the only thing I had. I had sinned, too, in my time, in my fashion, but I had asked for forgiveness. *They* let me keep the book; they *knew* . . . . and now, now you come to steal my book, Leslie."

"Leslie? You know me?"

"I knew a Leslie once."

"You—you can't have—you'll

tell about me—you'll—" (Was he a little boy again in his Eton jacket?). His eyes dropped to the prayer book, his blood, his blood was no longer on it, but the same indelible liquid they had put on the half-crowns, that was on the prayer book and that was now on her hands.

When he looked up in horror at her face, he found, below her little chin, a long red gash, his blood, her blood? He did not know, he did not want to discover. He ran screaming to the window, he struggled out, cutting himself again; not that it mattered, for he fell, still screaming. He fell and broke his neck, a bunched-up twisted body, his head somehow twisted beneath his body—as if he had been beheaded.

Charlie and the Captain were in the get-away car, Charlie's teeth were chattering like castanets.

"I tell you I saw him, saw him with me own eyes. Lost 'is footing or something—fell 'ead first, screaming with fright. Cor! Shook me, I can tell you!"

"Where's Mo'?" The Captain said, peering ahead as he increased the car's speed. "If he's not by that haystack, like I said . . . . !"

"There 'e is!" Charlie exclaimed, pointing through the windscreen.

Mo' stood by the roadside at the appointed place, anxiously glancing back at the Manor.

The Captain slowed down the car so that Mo' could jump on to the running board. They drove with him there for a short spell and then stopped for a moment so that he could clamber in.

"Where's Leslie? Didn't he get it?"

"No. Charlie said he fell."

"Yes, saw it with my own eyes, I did. 'E fell out of the tower window."

"Gawd!"

"I 'eard the poor bleeder scream."

"Fell inside the wall, I suppose?"

"Trust him—prayer book 'n' all."

There was a pause while Mo' considered all this.

"We flopped then, eh?"

"Yes. It was a cinch, too," the Captain said angrily.

"That Leslie—!" Mo' began in exasperation.

"I told you, we should never 'ave trusted an educated crook." Charlie muttered.

the man who hated the yankees

by Robert Andrea

In the late morning of a clear, warm spring day, Aloysius Smith loaded one shell into his high-powered telescope rifle, then disassembled the weapon and packed it neatly into a small black bag.

He put the bag on the floor, went to the mirror hanging on the wall, and smiled at himself. He was a small, thin, emaciated man; his eyes were fiery black and his hollow face resembled a death mask. Combing his hair —straight, and black as his eyes —he continued to smile.

Satisfied with his appearance, he moved away from the mirror, picked up the black bag with the rifle inside, and walked out of his shabbily-furnished room.

Outside, he squinted in the bright sunlight, (finally put his sunglasses on. The building from which he had come was an old brownstone with a sign over the entrance: LENNIE'S HOTEL - ROOMS CHEAP.

He walked along briskly on the crowded, sun-baked sidewalk, holding the black bag in his right hand. He was dressed in a gray-checkered sport shirt

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Robert Andrea, who now lives in Honolulu, has served with our Air Force in Japan and in South East Asia. A frequent contributor to this magazine and to others in the field, he has recently completed a novel about the War in Korea.

and an unpressed pair of dark brown trousers. He could have passed for a plumber or, in a more superstitious age, a sorcerer's apprentice.

He disappeared from the sidewalk into a subway station soon and waited patiently for his train to arrive.

A big, tall, square-shouldered man whom Aloysius did not know was waiting next to him. "Goin' to the ball game?" the man asked.

"Well, in a way," Aloysius replied.

"The Yankees'll murder 'em," the big man said.

"In ordinary times, no doubt they would," Aloysius said. "But I think today will be somewhat out of the ordinary. Still, they might win. It will be several weeks before the new strategy against them proves effective."

"Huh? What are you talkin' about, pal?"

"You'll see, my dear man. You'll see."

Then the train stopped and Aloysius quickly moved to the next car down to get away from the man. The man tried to follow, but just as he was about to enter the same door Aloysius had, it slid shut, and he missed the train altogether.

The train was crowded with people on their way to the ball game. Aloysius had to stand up; he grasped the rail handle almost as tightly as he held the little black bag.

When the train arrived at the stop nearest the ball park, Aloysius got out. But he did not follow the muttering crowd to the Stadium.

Instead, he walked to a cheap, tawdry-looking hotel similar to the one where he lived.

He went inside and said to the desk clerk, "I'd like a room. On the top floor. You can see the ball game from there, can't you?"

"Yeah, sure," the desk clerk said, "if you've got a pair of binoculars." He took a key off the board behind him, slapped it down on the counter, and added, "That'll be two bucks, pal."

"Here you are," Aloysius said, passing four fifty-cent pieces to the man. "I don't wish to be disturbed."

"Hah!" the clerk laughed. "As if we ever get any visitors here."

Aloysius took the ancient elevator to the tenth floor. Then he got and walked to his room, unlocked the door, went inside, locked the door, and sat down on the edge of the filty-looking bed.

He opened up the black handbag, put the rifle together, and got up from the bed and ambled over to the window.

He pulled up the dark green, torn shade, opened the window

to about half way, and looked across the way at the neat grounds of the Stadium. The players, still engaged in pregame practice, were like little white dots in the grassy outfield.

But even that far away, and with only the naked eye, Aloysius could tell that they were yankees. And he hated them. Every single one of them.

He checked to be certain that no one in the adjoining building was looking his way. Then, very calmly and carefully, he flicked the safety of the rifle off and put it through the window.

Now the players were bigger, thanks to the telescopic sight. Aloysius picked out the player he wanted, the big rangy outfielder named Dave Cantman, a leading Yankee slugger.

He had only one shot, only one chance he knew.

He waited until Cantman settled down in one spot, as he waited for the coach to hit the next fungo fly.

Then Aloysius squeezed the trigger.

The roar of the rifle echoed against the building walls from the window that came quickly shut after the shot, the window that in an instant was covered by a dark green shade.

Aloysius went over to the pay radio of the hotel room. He cursed under his breath for forgetting to put it on before he'd fired. Quickly he put a quarter in it and tuned to the station on which the Yankee game was to be broadcast.

They were still in the pregame "warm-up." The announcer suddenly interrupte.d that to report, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have an urgent bulletin from the dugouts. As we told you a moment ago star outfielder Dave Cantman seemed to collapse in the field as he was waiting for a fly ball. But we have just learned that he was shot. The bullet passed close to his heart. He is being brought to the hospital in critical condition. We'll keep you posted on any further developments, folks."

Aloysius grinned. One down, twelve to go. He wanted to get all of the starting lineup and the better pitchers.

He went back to the bed, once again took the rifle apart and packed it into the black bag.

Then he unlocked the door and walked outside. Downstairs, he said to the desk clerk, "I'm going out for a while."

"Say," the desk clerk stopped him, "did you hear a loud noise just about five minutes ago?"

"Yes, I did," Aloysius said. "Must have been some car that blew a tire."

"Yeah, I guess that's what it

was," the clerk said. "Sure did sound like a rifle shot, though."

Aloysius walked outside and started back toward the subway station. He didn't plan to return to the hotel near the Stadium for at least two weeks, after the Yankees returned home from a short road trip.

And in two weeks, he once again went through the same routine. This time his intended victim was Lefty Cassiday, the brilliant Yankee pitcher.

As Aloysius walked into the hotel near the Stadium, he saw that the same desk clerk was on duty. "I'd like to have that room I had last time," he said. "Remember? Ten-B I think it was."

The clerk's face appeared somewhat suspicious. "Yes sir," he said, a little nervously.

But he couldn't possibly know anything, Aloysius thought. He hadn't left any clues at all, he was sure.

He paid the clerk and went up to the top-floor room. He started to assemble the rifle.

Just as he had completed the task, the locked door reverberated with the pounding of fists and voices saying, "Open up that door! Open it up or we'll shoot our way in!"

Desperately, Aloysius tried to take the rifle apart so he could hide it. But it was too late. A shot rang out and the door burst open. Two uniformed policemen rushed into the room, followed by a plainclothesman.

"Hold it, buddy," the plain clothesman said forcefully, "or we'll fill you with hot lead!"

Aloysius didn't move.

"Now put that rifle down and stand up," the detective said.

Aloysius complied. "How did you know it was me?" he asked, his voice crestfallen.

The two uniformed men searched him as the detective, a thin, wiry man of about thirty-five, said, "That room clerk downstairs is a mystery fan. When the cleaning woman found an empty rifle shell in this room the day after you'd used it, she turned it over to him. He remembered the loud noise, the fact that a ball player had been killed by a rifle shot, and your mentioning that you wanted to see the game from the room. He put two and two together and called us. We thought his story jived, so we told him to call us back if he saw you again. He did."

Aloysius was taken to police headquarters and charged with murder. A psychiatrist was called in at once. Aloysius talked to him for several hours.

Then the detective who had broken into the hotel room and arrested Aloysius brought him to the interrogation room.

"What's your game, Smith?" the detective asked. "The psychiatrist says you're sane."

"Of course I'm sane," Aloysius said. "In fact, I resent strongly the implication that I'm anything else."

"Okay, then," the police detective said with a puzzled expression, "why did you kill Cantman? Why did you go back a second time to kill another ball player?"

"Really, Officer," Aloysius Smith said in an exasperated tone, "don't you policemen have any understanding of human nature at all? I'm a White Sox fan. What more motive do I need?"

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letters are poison

by George Harmon Coxe

PAUL BARON sipped Benedictine and leaned comfortably against the chairback, idly rotating the stem of the liqueur glass as he watched the shuffling couples on the crowded dance floor.

The orchestra, rising to the blaring crescendo indicated by Hal Lenardo's baton, finished the piece together, all twelve of them on the right note. The dancers slid to a stop, clapped abstractedly and without enthusiasm. Lenardo bowed, perfect teeth flashing in a patented smile. Turning, he nodded to the orchestra, laid down his baton and stepped from the platform, moving along the far wall towards the entrance.

The girl on Baron's left glanced at Janet Grainger and spoke abruptly, her voice stiff and jerky

"I'll try now."

She stood up. Baron stumbled erect and looked surprised. He remained standing, watching the girl until she moved out into the foyer a step or two behind

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George Harmon Coxe, former National President of the Mystery Writers of America and one-time newspaperman, is the author of fifty novels including the recent THE HIDDEN KEY (Knopf), and THE MAN WHO DIED TOO SOON (1962), DEATH AT THE ISTHMUS (1954), THE WIDOW HAD A GUN (1951), THE HOLLOW NEEDLE (1948), THE JADE VENUS (1945), MURDER IN HAVANA (1943), ASSIGNMENT IN GUIANA (1942), and THE BAROTIQUE MYSTERY (1936) (all published by Knopf).

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Lenardo. Then he sat down and said:

"So it was a frame-up? I wondered why we came here for dinner; why you asked her to join us."

"She couldn't come alone," Janet Grainger said. "She had to see Lenardo."

"About what?"

"Some letters. Janet Grainger toyed with her liqueur glass, watched it with troubled eyes. "She wrote them three or four years ago, when she was a sophomore at Smith."

"To Lenardo?" Baron asked. And when the girl nodded: "She should've known better. Should not write letters."

"I've written you."

"I'll remember that." Baron put a smile in his voice. "In case I get hard up and you throw me over."

The crack didn't register. Janet Grainger kept her eyes on the liqueur glass. "Lenardo was just becoming the rage then. He was a fad and Alice was down on a vacation." Dark blue eyes came up frank and direct, held Baron's gaze. "It didn't mean anything. Just a silly infatuation, I guess. But the letters—well—"

"They were hot?"

"Yes. They were."

Baron's lips made a tight line while he lit a cigarette. When he blew out smoke he glanced over at the now empty orchestra platform. Lenardo wasn't there, but he could see him just the same, standing there in white tie and tails, slim, arrogant, handsome, his thin face alternating in a shallow smile and a look of utter boredom.

Hal Lenardo. A good name for an orchestra leader. Not the right name, but much better than his real one. Some women still glanced over their shoulders at him as they danced past. And less than two months ago some kid had jumped to her death from his apartment.

An expression of acute distaste slid over Baron's lean, angular face. He was young, not yet thirty, but his smoky blue eyes were experienced. Five years of police work had left them a little hardened; there were not so many things to smile about. Those eyes were sombre as he looked back at Janet.

A trim black hat set modishly upon honey-coloured hair. Below this brows arched moderately in a smooth, young face that had the faintest trace of necessary make-up. She would look expensive in any company. She was expensive. She had colour, line, breeding; an outward coolness and assurance which was a heritage that many women cultivated.

Baron knew what she was thinking. Alice Estabrook was her best friend. Next month she would marry Jerry Townsend.

Which made the letters important. Baron knew Townsend casually. He seemed like a swell guy, but stiff. Form, conventions, meant a lot to him, to his family, which boasted generations of judges, statesmen, ministers.

"What should she do, Paul?" Janet Grainger's hand slid across the little table and pressed his openly.

"I don't know Baron said. "Maybe it would be easier to pay. Letters are poison. Blackmail is nasty, hard to handle sometimes."

"She can't pay. They want twenty-five thousand."

"Who's they?"

"She doesn't know. It wasn't Lenardo who came to see her. She hasn't got the money. Her folks won't be back from Europe for ten days. She tried to pay what she had this afternoon and ——"

Baron saw Janet Grainger's eyes lift, and was in time to hold the chair for Alice Estabrook. Tall and supple in a clinging velvet dress, she was a vivid brunette with a smart sophisticated manner and a definitely hands-off look about her. Now there was an unaccustomed pallor to her olive skin, and her dark eyes were uneasy when she sat down. The dress over her breasts pulsed in and out with hurried breathing; her hand shook as she reached for her liqueur.

"What happened?"

"He says he hasn't got them." Alice Estabrook drank the Chartreuse quickly as though forgetting what it was. "He doesn't know anything about them, says he hasn't seen them in years."

"What did he do?"

"Tried to——" Alice Estabrook finished the sentence with a gesture more emphatic than words. She shivered, said: "Ugh," and wiped the back of her hand to her lips. "I pushed him. Luckily he stumbled and fell so I could get out.

Baron pushed back from the table and stood up, his face flushed, stiff looking. Janet Grainger put out a restraining hand and Alice Estabrook, being sophisticated with an effort, said:

"Don't be heroic, Paul. You'll only make trouble. There's nothing you can do."

"Maybe there is."

"I don't want you to. If I've mucked things up I'm not going to make it worse."

Baron sat down slowly. The stiffness still showed in his jaw and lips. His eyes were hard and remote. When he spoke he did so quietly.

"What's the rest of the story? What happened before this development?"

"I got the first telephone call about a week ago," Alice Estabrook said. "I finally raised ten thousand. I told the man that

was my limit and he agreed to bring the letters this afternoon. He had all the envelopes, and he took one letter out to show me. I gave him the bills in a long envelope and he gave me the pack of letters. Only——"

Her hand lifted in a shrugging gesture. "Well, there were twelve envelopes and only two letters. The rest were blank paper. And in a half hour I had another phone call. He said when I got the other fifteen thousand I could have the rest of the letters."

"What did the guy look like?" Baron asked sharply.

"Rather large, with a long neck and something the matter with one eye. A kind of squint. He wore a derby."

"How did the letters start? What did you call Lenardo?"

"I called him Len. They would be *Len, darling*—something like that I guess." Her voice got brittle. "But I've forgotten how my mood used to be."

"Sit here a while," Baron said. "Order another liqueur and play with it until I get back. I've got an idea and——"

"No, Paul."

"But—" began Janet Grainger.

"Listen," Baron said. He hesitated, smiling faintly. That was the hell of it. No whining, no plea for help. It was her grief and she was going to take it. Which made it all the harder to sit still and do nothing. "I probably can't do any good. But I'm going to take a look."

"Please!" Alice Estabrook said.

"Sorry." Baron kept smiling, stood up.

"But I wouldn't have told you if——"

"But you did," Baron said. "And I guess I've got a complex. I hate blackmailers; I hate to see anyone gypped. I don't think there'll be any trouble."

Baron gave the hat-check girl a quarter, and when she brought out his hat and coat, he took the hat and told her to put the coat back. As he went out under the marquee, a husky sitting in the first line of parked cabs called:

"Hi, Baron. How's fer a hack?"

Baron waved. "Just going to the corner, Red," he said, and started across the street.

The night was cold, clear, with a smell of spring in the air. Clay Street was quiet; so was the Avenue when he swung around the corner drug-store and starteed North. Walking briskly past a block of drab brownstone fronts, he turned left, crossed the street, walked another half block to a new-looking apartment house. He stepped on a rubber mat which said *Traymore*, glanced at the row of mail-boxes in the foyer and took the automatic elevator to the top floor, the fifth.

In front of a pastel-blue door numbered 5-B, Baron pulled out a ring of keys. Inspecting the

lock, he selected a likely looking key and reached for the knob. When it moved beneath his hand, he kept turning it until the door opened. He pushed forward, saw that the room was lighted; then he stiffened slightly and stopped in the doorway, one hand on the knob.

A man was standing in front of a heavy, club chair, a thickset powerful-looking fellow with a deep-seated scowl and brown, weathered skin. He looked as if he'd just stood up. He had a gun in his hand, but he put it away when he saw Baron was unarmed.

Baron's brows lifted. "How did you get in? Have a key?"

"Naw, I came down the chimney." The man made a noise in his throat that sounded like a grunt of satisfaction. "Come on in," he ordered. "I've been waiting for you."

Baron closed the door and stood in front of it, eyes suspicious, but not worried. He was not a big man, but he was taller than average and his slenderness was the tough, sinewy kind, with every pound in the right place. His clothes—pin-striped suit of dark grey, white, collar-attached shirt, red and blue tie and polished black oxfords—were carelessly neat. They were always that way. He knew the sort of thing to buy and how to wear it. His alert, ready manner of holding himself suggested an excellent co-ordination of brain and muscle.

"I came back to even up for Rose," the fellow said, and bitterness flared up in his voice.

"Rose?" Baron's brows came down and made wrinkles at the bridge of his nose. His angular face was puzzled, expectant. "Rose who?"

"You know who." The voice was hard now. Cold green eyes were slits. A wide mouth curved in a mean little smile, and shoulder muscles bulged against the tight, ill-fitting coat.

"I musta been a couple days out of Manila when it happened. I got the news when I hit Pedro. I been three weeks gettin' here. Got in yesterday. I'm kinda late, but I'm here."

The man began to move across the room, shuffling his feet flat against the rug. "Don't get scared. I ain't gonna put a slug in yuh—like I oughta. I'm just gonna tear that pretty pan of yours apart and give some other dame a break."

Baron had been around enough to know the real thing when he heard it. There was no doubt about this. The man meant just what he said, and there were some pieces of the puzzle that Baron could not align although the general idea was clear.

"You don't like my pretty pan, huh?"

"I hate it!"

"Because there's something the matter with it, or because you think it's Lenardo's?"

"Don't give me that," the man growled. "This is the right joint. And you walked in like you owned it."

His hand darted to his pocket and whipped out a snouty automatic as Baron reached inside his coat.

"Forget it!" he rapped.

"Take it easy," Baron said. "You've got the right idea but your wires are crossed. Hal Lenardo's over at the Club Berkely on Clay Street. He's black-mailing a friend of mine and I came here to give the place a look."

He held out his pin-seal billfold, pulled a driver's license, a registration, an insurance identification card from one of the pockets.

The man stared, his scowl digging deeper. He began to curse as he put his gun away.

"And I was all set to do a nice job," he said. He started for the door, stopped to pivot. "Look here," he warned. "How do I know you won't clean this joint? I ain't takin' no rap for burglary."

"Stick around then," Baron said, moving towards a desk and pulling out a drawer. Watch me do it."

"Well—" The man hesitated. "To hell with it. I ain't got much time." He jerked open the door, said, "But I still don't like your pan," and slammed it as he went out.

Baron turned into Clay Street with his head down and a frown on his face. Police work had taught him how to search a place and he had done a quick and thorough job. But there had been no letters. Trouble settled over him, and his thoughts wandered to Janet Grainger and himself.

They had been friends for two years, more than friends the past few months. And even now Baron wondered why. Until four or five months ago he had been a cop. A depression cop. There had been just enough money after his father died to finish his last year in college. But in 1930 bright young college graduates were a drug on the market, and there had been no job for Baron until an old friend of his father's got him an appointment to the Police Academy.

His progress was rapid, and, he told himself, luck helped. He'd been on a couple of spectacular cases during the final year he was a detective; the reporters liked him; there had been some favourable publicity. He liked the work, but he hated the routine, and when an uncle died in Oklahoma and left him nearly a quarter of a million he had left the force.

But Janet—it was hard to ex-

plain. Born to wealth and position, she had everything — the finest schools, travel, the best clothes, a loyal line of suitors. Baron had met her at her brother's wedding, and since then. His thoughts checked angrily. Now, when her best friend was in trouble he couldn't help, couldn't do anything about. That no help was expected made his own position worse.

He was halfway across the street, heading for the Club Berkley canopy before he realized where he was, and he looked up just in time to see the man from Manila stride across the sidewalk. Partly screened by the first taxi, Baron stepped behind it, watched the fellow as he jerked open the door. Reflected light showed the weathered face just as grim, just as scowling as it had been in Lenardo's apartment. The m a n ' s movements were hurried, jerky.

The motor stuttered to life, and Baron waited while the cab lurched out from the curb and sped down the street. He kept watching it until it disappeared around the corner; then he entered the club.

Asdurian, the club's major domo and keeper of the gambling rooms on the third floor, was talking to the doorman and Baron nodded, said:

"Dana in?"

"I think so, Mr. Baron." Asdurian bowed obsequiously. He was very tall, very dark, very quiet, and his fathomless black eyes were set deep in a strong, bony face. "If you'll wait a moment I'll see if he's busy."

Baron didn't wait. When Asdurian started down the hall and up the thickly carpeted stairs, Baron glanced in the dining-room, found that he could not see his table, and followed right behind. Asdurian glanced over his shoulder, hesitated, but kept going.

They moved down the long second floor hall in the same order. The second door on the right was Lenardo's office. Baron intended to search it, but he wanted to give the orchestra leader time to return to the dining-room. He wondered if the fellow from Manila had found his man. Probably not or there would have been a c r o w d around. Asdurian turned into a short, t r a n s v e r s e corridor, knocked at the door at the end. When a muffled voice invited him in, Baron went right in with him.

The room was a smart and expensive-looking office. The rug was thick. There was a fireplace, gilt-framed oils on the walls. Dana Volpe sat behind a massive, flat-topped desk, smoking a cigarette and looking through a small card index. A flashily dressed f e l l o w with sloping shoulders that made his neck

seem long, sat on one corner of the desk. A derby was pushed back from the narrow forehead and one eye was nearly closed in a permanent squint.

Volpe grinned and said: "Hello, Baron. How is everything?"

Some things are O.K.," Baron said. "Some are very smelly."

"What is it? A complaint?"

"Yeah," Baron answered flatly. "But not about the club."

"Then how about a drink," Volpe said. He glanced at Asdurian. "Get something out, Andy."

Asdurian pushed a mahogany cellaret to the desk, lifted the top. He took out glasses and put Scotch in them, siphoned soda. Baron took his glass and dropped into a green leather chair. He did not drink right away, but studied Volpe.

He was a lean, loose-jointed man with a thin face, thin lips and sharp grey eyes. His smile was just a facial expression. He was egg-bald, but he had lots of eyebrows. He was not a big man, but he gave the impression that he was plenty tough, that no one pushed him around.

A gambler by profession, there were two sharply divided schools of thought about his reputation. One group said his games were on the level, that he was square and kept his promises; the other group said he was a chiseller and so crooked he'd frame his grandmother for money. From personal experience, Baron was not sure just what to believe, although right now, it would have made no difference either way.

"Lenardo," he said evenly, "is blackmailing a friend of mine."

"I wouldn't put it past him," said Volpe, unimpressed. "He's a rat. I'd like to wring his silky neck. His reputation stinks, and it's hurting the club. I'd can him now, except he's got a contract and I can't—yet."

Baron sipped the lukewarm drink, turned the glass slowly in his hand and spoke quietly, his cloudy eyes on the man in the derby.

"The letters are old. Lenardo says he hasn't seen them in years. But somebody has. Some guy pulled a gyp for ten grand this afternoon." He related a brief version of what had happened.

Volpe sat up in his chair, put down his drink and leaned across the desk. His eyes got hard, curious.

"Where," he asked thinly, "do I come in?"

"I don't know," Baron said calmly. "I though I'd ask if you were working a new racket?"

Volpe blew out a cloud of smoke, watched it evaporate in the air. Then he said, softly but very emphatically: "I don't like that, Baron. It don't sound good. If you've got a hand, show it. If not, beat it."

"O.K." Baron put his glass on the desk, met Volpe's boring gaze steadily. "I didn't come

here to make wisecracks. Does this punk work for you?" He glanced at the man in the derby.

"Upstairs," Volpe said. "In case there's any trouble."

"Well, he's the guy that did the collecting and the chiselling on those two letters this afternoon. Aren't you, Popeye?"

The man's face reddened in anger and he slid off the desk, said: "Listen, you!"

"Shut up!" Volpe clipped.

Baron said, softly: "He didn't say 'No,' did he?"

Volpe's cold eyes focused on Baron; t h e n on Popeye. He leaned back in his chair.

"So that's why I asked," Baron continued pleasantly. "Why don't you and Asdurian go out and buy the house a drink or something. I want to talk to this guy alone. Maybe he'll want to tell me some things."

Volpe stood up, circled the desk deliberately, brushing Popeye aside as he moved.

"You're out of step, Baron," he said quietly. "You've forgotten something. You're not a cop any more. You can't horn in here and clown around. So beat it. Before I have you thrown out on your ear and call a real cop to clear the sidewalk.

"I don't know anything about the letters, and I don't want to know. I don't want trouble. I've got enough of it. I'm beginning to think this place is full of chisellers, but I'll do my own house cleaning. If you've got an argument with Carney"—he looked at the man who still glared at Baron with his good-eye—"settle it some place else."

Baron's brows lifted lazily. He blew out his breath wearily, pursed his lips and stood up.

"Thanks for the co-operation," he drawled. "I just wanted to know how things stood."

Baron's indulgent m a n n e r changed the instant the door closed. There was a grim set to his angular face and his smoky blue eye were s u l t r y as he turned the corner into the main hall. He walked hurriedly to the third door, stopped, glanced about.

Palming the knob, he turned it gently. The door opened silently, and he pushed it far enough to get his head around the corner and look into the room. For a long second he held the awkward pose; then he went into the room with a quick forward motion, s h u t the door, locked it on the inside.

Hal Lenardo was sprawled on his back in front of an ornamental fireplace similar to the one in Volpe's office. He was still handsome, but he was no longer quite so neat. His tail coat was crumpled behind his back, his white tie was askew and the stiff shirt front was buckled. Baron saw this much from the door; when he approached he saw the rest of it.

Blood stained the edge of the carpet and the tile-like platform of the fireplace. Two brass rails bordered this platform, the top one about five inches high, the other midway between this and the tile. Supporting the two rails were three uprights, one at each corner and one in the centre; and there was a sharp, acorn-shaped knob protruding at the top of each upright. The knob on the left, nearest Lenardo's head, was slightly bent and a spot of blood gleamed darkly upon the polished surface.

Baron let his breath out slowly. He took out a handkerchief and wiped damp palms, then dropped to one knee and lifted a wrist that was still limp, still sligtly warm. He was staring sightlessly, separating tangled thoughts when someone rapped at the door.

Baron froze on one knee, waited breathlessly while his eyes darted about the room. The knob turned, rattled. The knock sounded again. A pause. Finally a voice said:

"Snap it up, Hal! We'll be late getting started."

The door-knob came to its original position and Baron began to b r e a t h e again. He straightened up and started a hurried search of the room.

One of the two explanations of murder that vortexed in his brain was obvious. The man from Manila. From his attitude in Lenardo's apartment, there was no questioning his intentions. He had been here about the right time.

The other explanation—Baron's thoughts b o g g e d down and there was a heaviness within him that could not be shaken. Alice Estabrook. She had pushed Lenardo. He had stumbled and fallen. Luckily, she had said. *That* could not have happened. Not that kind of a break. But ——

Baron tried to concentrate on his task. He went about his business mechanically, his face dark, his eyes troubled, brooding. He searched the desk, the green metal filing cabinet, the tallboy filled with a man's dress furnishings. He tried the cushions of the davenport, s h o o k out the curtains of the one window, inspected the lavatory; then, with a final shrug, he unlocked the door and peered into the hall.

There was no one about. The door lock was a spring affair, and, pressing one of the inset buttons, he stepped out of the room and closed the door, automatically locking it from the outside.

The men in the orchestra were fidgeting on the platform when Baron re-entered the dining-room. He went directly to his table, and felt the eyes of the two women upon him as he sat down.

"Did you——" Alice Estabrook began breathlessly.

"No," Baron said. "Haven't located them yet."

"There wasn't any trouble?" Janet Grainger asked.

"Not with me. But there will be trouble." Baron brought his eyes up to Alice Estabrook's, saw the undisguised anxiety in their dark depths.

"Lenardo is dead," he said thinly, hating what he had to do but going ahead in the hope that he was right, bluntly because he knew no other way.

They wouldn't believe him at first, either of them. He could tell by their eyes. A gasping chorus of questions, protests, fell about him, and he had to speak sharply to silence them.

"Wait," he said. "Maybe I'm a mug to tell you. But there's a chance somebody will know you, Alice; remember you went upstairs with him. I want you to be prepared in case anyone springs it on you. I don't think anyone will but—"

"Is he—is it from what I did? When he fell?"

"Certainly not," Baron said, and he said it convincingly. "Somebody slugged him. You had nothing to do with it, and there's no reason why you should be mixed up in it. Your folks are away. The best thing to do is go to Alice's home, the two of you. Wait for me."

"But you—" Janet Grainger began.

"Never mind me," Baron said. "I'm used to this sort of thing. It's murder now and murder's my business."

"Not any more."

"Still is—for a while. Please do as I tell you."

Baron's manner was crisp, incisive. There was no more argument. When the two women left the table, Janet Grainger stepped close to him.

"Do you have to get mixed up in it, Paul?"

Baron pressed her arm. "A little, I guess," he said, and made his voice light as he grinned. "Your reputation is ruined anyway. From just being seen with me. I'll try not make it worse."

"I'll wait with Alice," Janet Grainger said, and, outwardly poised, the two women walked unhurriedly from the room.

Baron signalled the waiter, ordered coffee and called for the check. He lit a cigarette, paid the bill, and sipped coffee until he had finished the cigarette. Then he went out to the foyer and climbed the stairs.

A worried-looking group of men were cluttered around the door of Lenardo's office. Volpe was coming from the other end of the hall with a key in his hand. As Baron drew near, Volpe unlocked the door and the crowd surged into the room behind him.

For a moment, as Baron went through the dorway, the room was very still. Then a quick, sta-

cato chorus of surprise, mostly curses, broke the silence.

Volpe said: "What the hell!" and half ran across the room.

Baron moved to the desk, let his troubled gaze drift slowly about. Volpe was on both knees beside the body. Asdurian loomed up beside him, his thick brows lifting his whole face as they arched above staring eyes. Popeye was open-mouthed, pale, his good eye distended and glazed. After a moment he swallowed and his Adam's apple flopped up and down in his long throat.

"You'd better clear 'em out," Baron said finally.

Volpe's head jerked around. "G'wan!" he told the rest of the crowd. "Back to your jobs. Start some music; and keep your mouths shut. Andy—Carney! Get 'em out!"

Baron shrugged and picked up the telephone. "Get me Police Headquarters," he said evenly.

Volpe jumped up and rapped: "Wait, damn it!"

"For what?" Baron asked caustically. Then, to the telephone: "Let me speak to Steve Hanauer, Homicide."

Paul Baron sat behind Lenardo's desk and watched the two white-coated internes lug a blanket-covered stretcher from the room. The precinct captain had already left. The photographer, and fingerprint man from the Bureau of Identification were just packing their paraphernalia.

Detective Steve Hanauer, watching the Examiner's man shrug into his coat and pick up his bag, said: "Well, did it, or didn't it, Doc?"

"I don't know yet. I'll have to have a plaster cast made of that knob"—the doctor glanced at the pointed knob that studded the fireplace railing—"and see how it compares with the wound. It'll probably fit; there's blood on it. It was a hell of a nasty crack. But I won't know until tomorrow."

When the medical man went out, Hanauer came over to the desk.

"Now that I've got everybody's story, how much of yours have you been holding out?"

Baron slouched lower in the desk chair, studied Hanauer with his chin on his chest. What he saw, the mental association aroused by this, reassured him. He liked Hanauer, knew him from working with him.

He was not very tall, but he had lots of shoulders and a broad, squarish face. He was not too brainy, and there was no style to his wrinkled clothes, but he had been a cop a long time, and he knew the percentages, called his shots. He was never tough unless he had to be; then he was tops.

"If I tell you," Baron asked,

"will you play ball with me?"

"How do I know?" Hanauer said flatly. "Things are a little different now. Maybe you and I are on different sides of the fence. I'm still a cop and I got a job to do."

Baron picked up a bronze paper cutter and poked absently at the crack of a desk drawer. Hanauer frowned and slid a thick thigh across the edge of the desk.

"There's a million motives," he went on. "Volpe had it in for him. Some dame came up here at intermission; he wasn't seen alive after that. Some guy, a tough-looking bird, the hat check girl said, came in about ten after nine and asked where his office was. When the guy came out, he came in a hurry."

"Besides that," Baron said, "there's at least fifty guys in town that would like to take a poke at him."

"And besides that," Hanauer added resentfully, "you were up here giving Volpe a song and dance about blackmail that Lenardo had a finger in." Hanauer leaned down, his dark eyes narrowed. "Who were the two women you had dinner with?"

Baron looked up, met Hanauer's searching gaze. He shook his head. "That one is out."

"Maybe not," Hanauer said. "Maybe I could guess one."

"Maybe."

"And maybe you remember you were up on this floor at just about the right time to pop this guy. There's only one way of getting an alibi. Those women might give you one. And it could be fixed so you'll need one. Then you'll either talk or—"

Baron smiled grimly and shook his head.

Hanauer said: "For Gawd's sake, Paul," exasperatedly. "Do I have to get tough?"

"You might get too tough."

"Then be reasonable. What the hell. Powers'll tie you up in a knot and like it."

The light went out of Baron's eyes, left them smoldering. "Powers," he said, thinking of the District Attorney's bright assistant who had long awaited a chance to get something on him, "would love it."

He sat up on the chair, tossed the paper cutter aside and took a cigarette from a trick box shaped like an elephant where cigarettes rolled out individually on the two, uptilted tusks.

"I'll give it all to you," he said slowly. "All except one thing. So far we've got along. We've played ball together. Maybe we can keep it that way."

Leaning forward, he told about the letters, the popeyed man, gave in detail the episode in Lenardo's apartment. He had scarcely finished when Hanauer cut in abruptly.

"Rose? You say this guy said Rose? Hell." He slid from the

desk and his eyes got bright with interest. "That was the doll that jumped from Lenardo's place. Rose Joslin. She didn't have any folks but a brother, and we couldn't locate him because he was a sailor. Hell! That's the guy, and the motive and everything. Only—"

Hanauer broke off and his face sobered. He scratched the back of his neck and looked suddenly dejected. "It's gonna be fun findin' him. Nobody saw him but the girl downstairs and—"

"I can give you a lead if—"

"If what?" groaned Hanauer. "Every time you say something you hand me another string, a couple ifs and a but."

"This isn't much," Baron said, getting out of the chair. "I just want to play along. So that if those letters should turn up—"

"Who was the girl?" Hanauer asked sharply.

Baron smiled, spread his hand in resignation.

"O.K.," Hanauer said grudgingly. "I guess the letters are yours if we find 'em. What's the lead?"

"Find Red Mallory who drives a Brown and White. Joslin took his hack when he left here."

"Come on," said Hanauer. "We'll nail that baby."

Baron did a lot of thinking in that ride to the city's South End after they had located Red Mallory and found Joslin's address.

There was more to the job than letters now. If found they would hopelessly entangle Alice Estabrook; if not found Popeye, or his accomplice, would still try to collect. And in spite of Baron's efforts to reassure himself, the ugly thought reared its head that Lenardo *might* have died from the fall when the girl pushed him. Tomorrow the Examiner's office would have a statement that would clinch the problem. But by that time it might be too late to get clear.

It was Powers, the Assistant District Attorney, who worried Baron most. Tomorrow Powers would have the story, and the minute he knew Baron was mixed up in the affair he would be on his tail; when he learned Baron was looking for letters, he, too, would look for letters. The old animosity could be counted upon. Whatever Baron was for, Powers was against.

The taxi angled to the kerb, stopped. March Street, a two-block length of ancient frame structures converted into sooty-windowed rooming houses, was quiet and deserted at twelve-thirty. Baron followed Hanauer to the sidewalk and they hesitated a moment in front of a narrow, three-storeyed house. The outer door was open. Beyond a frosted glass inner door a light burned dimly. They went up the steep, narrow steps together, entered a square vestibule with a

baby-carriage jammed against one wall. Hanauer tried the inner door, rang the bell when he found it locked.

A tall, gaunt woman in a faded - blue, quilted wrapper, opened the door after the third ring. She looked angry, and took no pains to disguise the fact.

"What do you want?" she snapped.

"Got a man named Joslin here?" Hanauer asked.

"No."

"You did have."

"He left."

"When?"

"Tonight." The woman started to close the door and Hanauer pushed it open and stepped inside, forcing the woman to relinquish her hold.

"Do you want me to call the police?" she blazed.

"I'm the police," Hanauer said flatly, and took out his shield. "Look it over," he directed, "and calm down before I wake up the house."

The woman wilted slightly and pulled her wrap closer. "I don't know anything about him," she said defensively. "He came yesterday noon and said he wanted a room for a couple days. He paid me, and he went out with his bag about ten tonight."

Hanauer l o o k e d at Baron, sighed wearily. "Do I get the breaks? Anyway," he told the woman, "I'll h a v e a look. Where's his room?"

The room was on the second floor. It was good sized, and furnished with an iron bed, a dresser, a threadbare rug and sloppy-looking curtains. The bed had not been used. There were a couple magazines on the floor and a broken china ash tray filled with cigar butts. There was nothing in the closet or dresser drawers.

The landlady was waiting for them when they went downstairs, and Baron stepped ahead of Hanauer and walked to a pay-telephone hanging on the wall adjacent to the stairs. He found a nickel, asked for the sumber of the *Morning Standard.*

"Ship-news reporter," he said a moment later. And to Hanauer as he waited: "He oughta still be on."

When a voice said: "Tolman speaking," Baron said: "This is Steve Hanauer at Headquarters."

"Quiet," Baron said. Then: "What've you got on the list that came in yesterday morning from the West Coast and sailed late tonight?"

The voice said: "Wait a minute—the *Cambria,* I think. Yeah. Cleared at midnight for New York, San Francisco and the Orient."

Baron said thanks and relayed the information to Hanauer, who did not act very pleased about it. "Lucky Steve. That's me," he muttered.

"It could be worse," Baron said. "She's probably dropped the pilot by this time, but you can wire New York and have him taken off. That part's a break anyway."

His own disappointment did not show in his voice. It was inside him, festering. Tomorrow would be tough now. He didn't want to go to the Estabrook apartment and face the two who waited for him. He'd have to do a lot of lying. And he didn't think he'd be so hot at it.

He followed Hanauer out the door. The landlady said: "Is that all?" caustically.

"Yeah," Hanauer grumbled.

"Almost," Baron said, and turned on the top step as one other thought sliced through his brain. "Has anyone else been here asking for him?"

"Yes. About an hour ago. A man with a derby and a bad eye. Good *night*!" The door clocked shut to punctuate the sentence.

Popeye! Baron felt a quick lift of an intangible weight. Here was a straw to grab. What it might amount to he could not guess. Did not bother now. It was enough that he had another chance. He remembered again how much he wanted to see that individual with the bad eye.

"Hell," Hanauer said, and a note of admiration crept into his voice. "Why didn't I think to ask her that?" He stopped dead still on the sidewalk, as though he exuected an answer. "You're still a smart dick, Paul. You should've never left the force."

Baron opened the cab door and said, "Popeye," as though the word left a pleasant taste in his mouth. "I want to see that guy."

"Me, too," Hanauer said.

It took Hanauer fifteen minutes to locate Popeye's address, another fifteen minutes to reach it, a third floor door at the end of a narrow, poorly lighted hall that was heavy with a stale, slightly sour smell.

Hanauer's nose wrinkled in distaste and he shifted his service revolver from its holster to his coat pocket. "Is this guy tough?" he whispered.

"That's what I want to find out," Baron clipped, unbuttoning his topcoat. "Come on, knock."

Hanauer knocked; knocked again. Making noises in his throat he tried the knob and looked surprised when the door opened.

The room was a shambles. Cheap furniture was upset and scattered about. Magazines, papers, were strewn all over the floor; ashes and cigarette butts made humps on the rug under overturned ash-trays. A curtain had been torn down and a vase-like lamp base had shattered into a hundred pieces.

Right in the middle of it was Popeye.

Hanauer said: "Hell," and jumped forward.

Baron leaned back against the door, shoulders sagging. He didn't look quite so young anymore. Worry, trouble, lined his angular face and his blue eyes looked very dark in the shadow of his hat brim. He had wanted, had counted on finding Popeye alive.

He moved slowly forward. The man's face looked pulpy around the mouth and nose. He had a lump over one ear and there was blood all over his vest and shirt collar. One coat sleeve was torn, had slipped down, hiding his hand.

Then, as the two men stared down at the fellow, a foot moved, the knee bending, then straightening. Hanauer wheezed a curse, and Baron held his breath. A voice that was but a faint moan said:

"No. Oh, please, don't! Don't!"

Hanauer dropped to one knee and bent close. "By Gawd, he's alive!" He looked confidently at Baron. "And it was Joslin who did him in."

"Why?" Baron wanted to know.

"Popeye was lookin' for him, wasn't he? And this Joslin was a hard guy. Somebody sure this bird around. Suppose Popeye knew about the taxi Joslin took. Suppose he finally found him, made a date here and tried to shake him down."

"Then Joslin didn't make his ship."

"He could jump it, couldn't he?"

Baron shook his head, remained unconvinced. On close inspection he saw that most of Popeye's wounds were superficial. Most of the blood had come from his nose, and that blood made things look worse than they were. The lump over the ear looked like the most serious wound.

He began to feel the man's clothing. When he found an automatic in the hip pocket he said: "He wouldn't keep that gun in his hip pocket if he wasn't pretty sure of the guy he let in this room."

Hanauer began to shake Popeye's shoulder. "Who did it? Who hit you?"

The injured man moaned again. His legs began to move restlessly. "Don't!" he wheezed. "Dana—don't!"

"Dana!" echoed Hanauer, jumping to his feet. "Dana Volpe? Hell, yes. It could be him. Look, Paul," he said earnestly. "He mighta been in with Lenardo. And this guy worked for Volpe—probably was in on it. He musta got slugged to shut his mouth."

Hanauer glanced about the room, went into the adjoining bedroom. "There ain't any

phone," he said when he came back. "You wait here. Wait till I call in and send the wagon around. Maybe he'll talk some more. I guess he don't want that Joslin guy now but I'm going to the Club Berkley and see Volpe."

Baron lit a cigarette and walked idly about the room, came back to Popeye and kneeled beside him. One thought which had occurred to him since Hanauer had left, bothered him. How did Popeye know where Joslin lived? There had to be an answer, but he couldn't find one that clicked. He leaned down, his mouth close to Popeye's ear, began to shake him gently. What the hell was this guy's right name? Carey—no, Carney.

"Carney," he called. "Carney. How did you find him? How did you know where Joslin was?"

"No—No!" Carney twisted his head, and moaned, the twisted ravings of a tortured, unconscious brain.

"How did you find him?" Baron pressed. "How did you know where to look? How did you tail him?"

"Taxi—taxi! Oh, ——! Don't!"

Baron stared, eyes lifting to the opposite wall of the room. Taxi. That was it. Someone besides himself had seen Red Mallory take Joslin away, had talked with Red afterwards. Who, then, was at the Club Berkely entrance when Red drove Joslin off? The doorman? Yes; but he wouldn't count. One other man. Andy Asdurian, The club manager.

He sat back on his heels, kept staring while a tight, grim smile pulled his lips back. Pushing himself erect, he took one more look at Carney. He walked across the room, reached for the door-knob, dropped his hand and came back to the unconscious man. Still smiling, he rolled him to one side, removed the automatic from the hip pocket. Then he opened the door and stepped into the hall.

Outside the street was dark, deserted. Hanauer had taken the taxi. and Baron had to walk two blocks to Washington Street before he saw a cruising cab. Hailing it, he rode to the nearest all-night drug-store, went to the phone booth and looked up Asdurian's address in the directory. Memorizing it, he found the the number of Volpe's club, called it and left a message for Hanauer, to tell him where he was going and to follow quickly.

The address Baron gave the taxi-driver proved to be a run-down apartment building near one corner of a run-down block. Aside from the foyer there were no lights in the three storeys of front windows, and Baron moved quickly across a cracked-tile entryway, began to climb rub-

ber-treaded stairs through a thick gloom that was damp and chilly.

There was no sound at all in the second floor corridor, and he walked confidently to a newly shellacked door on the right and knocked briskly.

"Yeah," a low voice said after a pause. "Who is it?"

"Carney."

A key clicked. The door opened wide and Baron stepped swiftly into the opening, twisting sidewise as he moved and shoving the automatic hard against the stomach of the man who loomed above him.

"Back up," he ordered, pushing with the gun so that the man had to obey.

There were two men in the living-room. Both jumped up and one of them clawed for a shoulder-holster. Baron said:

"Tell 'em to sit down!"

"Sit down."

The two men hesitated. A hand dropped from inside a coat—empty. The men sat down. Baron heeled the door shut, backed to the wall, and for the first time, glanced up at the impassive, bony face of Andy Asdurian.

Baron sized up the room and began to move along the wall, circling behind the two men. One of these was rather tall, with a moustache, a pimpled complexion and a definitely hooked nose; the other fellow was plumper, with a sallow skin and pale eyes. He was dressed like a dandy—grey suit, green shirt and red tie—his black hair was pomaded and he smelled of perfume. Looking back at Asdurian, Baron said:

"The three of you go over on the couch and sit down—so I can watch you."

Asdurian ordered the two men to the sofa with a jerk of his head, moved with them and sat down between them. Even now there was about him that quiet, obsequious manner. His long, bony face was unruffled, the thick brows at rest.

"What is the idea of this?" he asked politely.

"I thought we ought to have a talk," Baron said drily. "I wanted to be sure we had it. Just keep your hands on your knees and everything will be O.K."

He waited, his grin hard and sharp, until the three pairs of hands were where he wanted them.

"I just came from Popeye's," he said pleasantly. "Volpe beat hell out of him. Hanauer went looking for Volpe and after he left I got an idea. The idea that you sponged out Lenardo. And if I'm right that far maybe you were in with him on that blackmailing."

Asdurian smiled. "I'd like to hear about it."

"I don't know where Volpe fits," Baron continued, "or why

he beat up Popeye. But Popeye fits. And so do you." He explained about his encounter with Joslin in Lenardo's apartment, how he had seen the man take the cab, and how he and Hanauer had checked this and found Joslin gone.

"Popeye traced Joslin. He traced him by the taxi-driver, the same as we did. And that was the lead I needed. How the hell did Popeye know about Joslin? How did he know he took a cab —how did he know he took that particular cab?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Asdurian said, and still sounded interested and polite.

"The hell you don't. Look." Baron began to move towards the sofa. "When I came in the club, Popeye was up in Volpe's office. And where were you? Talking with the doorman. You were the only guy besides me and the doorman that had a chance to know which cab Joslin took.

"The doorman had no reason to be interested. But you did, Asdurian. You made damn sure. And if Popeye knew how to trace Joslin, you told him. So maybe Popeye worked for you as well as Volpe, huh? And Popeye collected for those letters and——"

Baron moving slowly forward, saw the hat. It was covered by the fringe of the sofa, so that only the brim showed. He stopped, eyes narrowing; then said: "Kick that hat out, one of you."

The fellow with the moustache, sailed the grey felt out to Baron's feet. Baron watched the three men, kneeled, picked it up, took a quick glance inside.

One side of the sweatband had been perforated by a stamping machine. The two large initials, fashioned by a pin-point outline were D. V.

"I guess that makes the party complete." he said cardonically. "Will Hanauer be burned!"

He backed two steps, turned slightly and got a wary, corner-of-the-eye picture of the room. There were no closed doors here, but he saw one in the inner hall that led to the apartment's other room.

"I used to be a pretty good shot," he warned. "So use your own judgment."

Moving cautiously backward, he went through the hall doorway. The closed door was at his immediate right, and there was a key in the lock. By crossing his left hand in front of him, he kept the gun steady. He turned the key quickly, fumbled for the knob.

What happened then gave him no chance for thought. As he touched the knob the door shot outward, slamming him back against the opposite wall of the narrow hall. Before he could recover a human cyclone burst

from the closet. An egg-bald head catapulted into space, landed under his chin, straightened him up; then fists slammed into his stomach in a one-two punch and he crumpled, slid to the floor with Volpe on top and his gun underneath. Baron was too busy gagging for breath to do any thinking. When he was finally able to get to his knees, Volpe was standing with his hands high. Asdurian and the fellow with the moustache, each holding a gun, were a few feet in front of Volpe and Asdurian was saying:

"Now that's what I call teamwork."

Dana Volpe was too angry to be apologetic. His grey eyes were bright and hot. His face was florid, and so was the bald head, except for a bluish lump near the crown. He chewed his words without moving his lips.

"How the hell did I know it was you? I couldn't hear anything in that hole. They slugged me and put a rope on my wrists. I worked it off. And things didn't look so rosy for me anyway. I figured the first guy that opened the door I'd let him have it—and I hoped it would be Asdurian."

Baron and Volpe were sitting on the sofa now. The perfumed dandy was in one of the other rooms, and Asdurian and the man with the moustache stood waiting, guns in hand.

"Anyway," Baron said bitterly, "you were a big help to me."

"And to me," Asdurian added evenly.

"And nuts to you, too," Volpe lipped. "Let's see what your act looks like and——"

Baron, thinking of Hanauer, cut in quickly. "How did you do such a job on Popeye? He's bigger than you are but——"

"I hit him first and I used a sap," Volpe said. "He had it coming. I told you tonight I had a bunch of chisellers around the club. Carney and Asdurian were milking me for plenty. They were up there in the game room, and it was hard to check on 'em. I knew they were in it together, and when you told me Carney collected on the blackmailing I knew Asdurian was behind it some place, probably with Lenardo."

"Then why didn't you say so?" said Baron angrily.

"I told you I'd do my own house cleaning."

"You need lessons."

"Yeah?" Volpe snorted disgustedly. "I took Popeye, and I got the story. I'd've taken this mug"—he glared at Asdurian—"if the two punks hadn't surprised me."

The perfumed fellow came out of the other room with a gladstone bag and Asdurian said:

"Put it back. I guess I don't have to skip."

There was a new and ominous chill to the man's voice now, and

Baron began to talk. It took time to talk. He made his voice indulgent, concentrated on keeping Asdurian's interest.

"I guess I didn't finish my story," he said. "Where was I? Oh, yeah. Why didn't you tip off the cops about Joslin? You saw him leave."

Asdurian smiled, said nothing. Backing to a secretary, he opened a drawer, took out a handkerchief-wrapped object.

"I'll tell you why," Baron went on. "Because Lenardo was dead when Joslin went into his room. You had an argument, you slugged Lenardo, or knocked him down. And when you left the room, Joslin must have seen you come out.

"He didn't know you. And when he saw what had happened he knew what it would look like if the cops found him. He got out. And you were downstairs to see him go. You knew what cab he took because you told Popeye; but you didn't tell the cops, and for a damn good reason. You didn't dare let Joslin tell his story. You sent Popeye to get him, and he'd already gone."

"You guessin'?" Volpe cracked. "Or do you know?"

"Both," Baron said. "It's gotta be that way."

Asdurian unwrapped the handkerchief. "There's blood on this, and maybe a little hair. I didn't get a decent chance to get rid of it and I was going to skip anyway."

"With a lot of my dough," Volpe fumed.

"And the ten grand Popeye collected," Baron added grimly.

"But I won't have to, now," Asdurian said. "I'll want to leave that gun where it'll do the most good."

Baron threw words out, clinging to his original purpose.

"What did you kill him for? Why did—"

"What do you think?" Asdurian asked easily.

"I think you and Lenardo were going fifty-fifty with the letters. Popeye collected ten grand, and Lenardo didn't know it. You would've skipped with it if it hadn't been for the girl. She went to see Lenardo. She told him she'd already paid ten grand. And when you went in after she'd left—"

"He pulled this on me," Asdurian said. He held up the automatic in the handkerchief, and for the first time his voice was harsh. "I hit him too hard."

"And," Baron said, "then you bent that brass knob and smeared blood on it."

Asdurian's black, deep-set eyes were sharp now, pitiless, as though glazed by some warping of the brain. He forgot to be polite. He put down the blood-stained automatic and levelled the gun in his right hand.

"Stand up!" he ordered.

Baron stood up. Finally Volpe joined him.

"You," Asdurian told Volpe, "get over here by the wall."

Volpe rubbed his palms on his thighs, hesitated, and looked as if he was going to argue. Then his lips curled offensively and he started for the wall. He took just two steps, passing in front of Asdurian, when the big man struck—swung his gun with a vicious horizontal sweep of his arm, and rapped it hard against the base of Volpe's skull.

Volpe sighed, stumbled, dropped in a heap and rolled against the baseboard. Baron's muscles jerked. He leaned forward, stiffened. Asdurian's trigger finger tensed. Baron steadied himself, relaxed. He was still four feet from Asdurian and he knew he'd never make it.

"I might've taken care of Volpe if it wasn't for you," Asdurian said.

"You'd better take a run out while you can," Baron argued.

Asdurian shook his head and smiled. "You know too much." He nodded to the two men who stood waiting "Hold him. Get his arms."

The men came around behind Baron, sort of pounced on him at the last moment, as though afraid he would turn on them. Each took an arm, pinioned it behind him.

Asdurian nodded in approval. "I'm going to plant this murder gun on Volpe. Then I'm going to call the police. With what Carney says—and he'll talk my way now—and what I say, and the gun, it should stick. But you—you'll have to disappear."

Baron wet his lips. Asdurian's plan wouldn't work. He didn't know about the message Baron had left at the Club Berkely for Hanauer. As a last resort Barton could speak of this, but—even that might not stop Asdurian. Something in his eyes, in the taut lines of his face warned of a man who, desperate, was no longer open to reason.

As he watched Asdurian, trying to think of an argument, the fellow lowered his gun. Stepping quickly forward, he swung his left and leaned with the punch.

Baron had time to jerk his head an inch or so. The blow smashed between jaw and cheekbone. His head rocked back, dropped forward. He slumped, his feet flat on the floor and his knees buckling. For a second or two as he sagged the two men supported him; then they let go.

Bent-kneed, Baron lunched forward, as though he was falling. Then, as he was about to lose his balance, he took off from his toes and dove straight ahead. He could not see very well through the haze of pain that clouded his brain, but he

did the best he could. Grabbing for Asdurian's gun with his left hand, he drove his right fist into the man's belt-line with all the power of his body behind it.

The act was good. Asdurian never had a chance. He said: "Owumpp," as his breath pushed out; he bent double in collapse, dropping the gun.

Baron's fingers touched cold steel. He grabbed, missed, grabbed again. Then his diving charge spilled him against Asdurian and the two of them hit the floor in a tangle of arms and legs, the gun somewhere in the heap.

The fellow with the moustache was waiting when Baron rolled clear of the retching Asdurian and got his head up. The automatic, held three feet from his face, loomed enormous. When the fellow said: "Get up and reach!" Baron obeyed.

It was five minutes before Asdurian could stand; another minute before he could talk clearly. But that time his bony face was livid and his eyes were blazing. Ordering his two men to stand behind him, he backed a few feet from Baron and lifted his gun.

"Nobody," he breathed, "can do that to me."

Baron's eyes met Asdurian's and the sweat came out on his face.

He felt it on his upper lip, on his forehead. His hands felt cold.

Those black eyes were bright and glassy. They did not belong to the face, to any face. They were no longer human and they telegraphed a final warning. Asdurian had lost control. Perhaps the man was not insane in the ordinary accepted sense; perhaps part of his brain was functioning perfectly; but at least one part was blotted out by the unreasoning rage that gripped him.

"Listen!" Baron said, and knew he was yelling, knew that his only hope now was Hanauer, if Hanauer could get there in time. "I tipped Hanauer off. You can't get away with it now." His eyes swivelled from side to side, touched the door-knob. It was moving. Somebody was behind that door, trying to get inside before his presence was known. Hanauer? He jerked his eyes back and began to talk again, not knowing what he said.

Suddenly the room was very still. Tension held the four men immobile. No one moved; no one seemed to breathe. Baron waited, muscles tensed, eyes torn back to the gun. Fascinated, he saw the knuckles tightened against the skin. The trigged finger moved slightly. Then he flopped sidewise and yelled: "Watch it, Steve!" as he fell.

A gun roared as he hit the floor. Somebody yelled. Baron

rolled, did not look around until he knocked against the sofa a second later.

Steve Hanauer stood in the doorway, his gun out and levelled. Asdurian had jerked his head around, but his big body had not yet made the turn.

Hanauer rapped: "Drop it!"

Asdurian kept turning, swung his gun. And Hanauer—Hanauer had been a cop a long time and he knew the percentages. Without hesitation he shot Asdurian through the chest; without apparently moving he fired again, and the fellow with the moustache screamed and his arm was slapped sidewise as though someone had struck it. The gun in his hand went off, wildly, and he dropped it as his arm swung limply to vertical.

Asdurian's feet did not move, but his body did. It spun slowly around, started by the impetus of the slug, and kept turning until he faced Baron and his legs were wound up and he could turn no farther. He never did move his feet; he just collapsed, sat there, upright, like a Hindu fakir, the wild, glassy look still in his eyes.

The perfumed man, a statue in chalk, watched it all; did nothing.

Asdurian lay on his side, just where he had flopped when Death caught up with him. Volpe, still unconscious, lay near a baseboard. Hanauer had called Headquarters, and had locked the perfumed man in the closet along with the gunman who had been shot in the arm. Now the detective followed Baron through the apartment, pleading for information and then trying to digest it as Baron searched the place and explained.

There was still a sweat on Baron's lean face; his hands were none too steady, and he kept them busy. Talk, movement, quieted his nerves, and he finally located a green metal security box in Asdurian's Gladstone bag. It was about a foot long, this box, perhaps six inches wide and two deep.

Hanauer followed him back to the living-room while Baron searched Asdurian and found the key. When he had unlocked the box he saw there were four or five long envelopes inside, and as he thumbed through them Hanauer said:

"But damn it all, Paul, why didn't you tell me about Asdurian seeing Joslin get in the taxi?"

"I didn't remember it. Didn't think it made any difference; wasn't sure he did see him. You were in such a sweat to get Volpe that—"

"Well," Hanauer argued weakly, "I knew he'd beat up this guy Carney."

"—you couldn't wait," Baron finished. "When Popeye said

'Taxi' I remembered. I knew *he* didn't see Joslin; So Asdurian *had* to see him."

He found the envelope he wanted then, pulled out ten letters on expensive-looking blue paper, and a sheave of hundred-dollar bills which he quickly counted. The ten thousand was all there, and when he glanced at the first letter and saw, *Len, darling,* he showed them to Hanauer.

"This is it," he said.

"Yeah," Hanauer said. "I said you could have the letters and you can. But that dough—"

"It goes with the letters, don't it?" Baron answered sharply. "I told you about that. Or do I have to give you a cut?"

"How would you like a bust on the nose?" Hanauer said sourly.

"I thought so," Baron grinned, and shoved the envelope in his pocket.

Hanauer sighed, stepped to the telephone. As he waited, after giving his number, he looked down at the unconscious Volpe. "Now there's a real tough guy for you. I'm gonna put him and Popeye in the same room at the hospital . . . Yeah, Hello, honey. How's the kids? . . . No, I guess not. Don't know when I'll get in. Just put a couple bottles on the ice, and don't wait up."

Baron opened the door as Hanauer hung up. "Keep me out of the papers as much as you can," he said. "I'll try and get down to the office in about an hour."

As he started down the hall, he heard the door open. Looking back he saw Hanauer stick his head out. "Hey, Paul," the detective asked softly, "who was the girl?"

"Mary Queen of Scots," Baron said. "But don't tell anybody."

A half dozen residents of the floor, aroused by the shooting and dressed in nightclothes and bathrobes, were gathered at the stair landing. They saw Baron come out of the death room; when they saw that he was smiling, they drew back to let him pass and looked at him as if he were definitely crazy.

Baron didn't know why; he didn't know he was smiling.

The two women were waiting on the divan when Baron entered the Estabrook drawing-room twenty minutes later. Both stood up and hurried towards him, dark eyes anxious, blue eyes relieved.

"I was worried, Paul," Janet Grainger said frankly. "You've been gone—"

"Did you find out—" Alice Estabrook cut in stiffly, and did not finish the sentence.

Baron grinned at Janet Grainger and said: "Sorry. It was more than I thought." As he reached into his pocket and he looked at Alice Estabrook. She

needed make-up badly now. Her dark eyes were very large, very tired; a bit hopeless, as though she knew Baron had brought an answer, and was afraid of it.

"Yes," Baron said, pulling out the envelope. "I found out you had nothing to do with the murder—and I found these." He took out the letters, showed the money in the envelope.

Alice Estabrook stared silently for a moment, holding tightly clasped hands to her breasts. Then she reached out. She paid no attention to the money, tossing the envelope to the divan. And suddenly, the emotional reaction became too powerful and she was no longer a smart, sophisticated young woman.

She leafed through letters, gave a happy little cry while tears of relief welled in her eyes. Then she sobbed two or three times and, crumpling the letters in one hand, threw both arms around Baron's neck and kissed him hard and long on the mouth. When she stepped back there was colour in her cheeks and she was smiling through her tears.

"Well," Janet Grainger said, "am I jealous?" But her tone was anything but jealous. Looking at her, Baron saw that her eyes were shiny and happy, and maybe a little proud.

He coloured and got tongue-tied for a moment as she said: "When is it my turn?"

Baron grinned and took her by the arm. "Just as soon as we get in the cab I've got waiting," he said. "Grab your hat and coat."

When they went into the foyer arm in arm, he looked over his shoulder. Alice Estabrook was standing in front of the fireplace tearing blue notepaper into very small pieces.

NEXT MONTH –

SIMON TEMPLAR WAS USED TO BEING ASKED FOR HELP — BUT NOT FOR THE REWARD THIS CASE MIGHT HAVE EARNED HIM!

THE RUSSIAN PRISONER

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the October issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

one way to waterloo

by Richard Hardwick

NELL FENN met her husband at the door, closing the door quickly after him against the sudden blast of cold air. She raised on tip-toe and kissed him on the cheek.

"That man called again, Dexter. The one that called last night while you were out. He wanted to know what time you'd be in."

Dexter Fenn paused in the motion of removing his overcoat, feeling the chill sliver of apprehension shoot up his spine.

"Did—did Uncle Albert phone?"

"No, dear. No one but that man. I don't like the way he sounds, Dexter. Who is he?" She helped him off with his overcoat and hung it nearly in the tiny hall closet.

Dexter Fenn loosed his tie and picked up the folded newspaper from the hall table. "It's . . . it's just business. What have you got for dinner?"

"Chops and spinach. And some new rolls I found in the supermarket. Were you expecting a call from Uncle Albert?"

"Sort of. I phoned him from

Uncle Albert had gotten his message. But Uncle Albert had chosen to not return the call. He never did. He was waiting for him to drive out there and to beg abjectly. . . . Mr. Hardwick, one of the more interesting writers among the newer names, explores this subject, no doubt familiar to those in Caesar's Rome.

---

the office this morning but Jason had taken him for a drive. I left my number with the cook. I don't suppose the idiot remembered to give him the message."

He slumped into a chair in the living room and snapped the paper open, reaching up and loosening his tie still further as his eyes moved unseeing over the headlines. Nell went to the kitchen and returned shortly with a small brandy glass.

"You look tired, dear. Here, this will help."

Brandy was one of the things Dexter had picked up from Uncle Albert. Dexter took the glass, sniffed deeply over it, then took a swallow of the warming fluid. He sighed and leaned back in the chair.

Uncle Albert had gotten his message, alright. But Uncle Albert chose not to return the call. He never returned Dexter's calls. Therefore, there was only one thing to do. Dexter would have to drive out and see him the first thing in the morning.

The phone rang as Dexter and Nell were finishing dinner. Dexter rose quickly, patting his mouth nervously with his napkin. "I'll get it, Nell."

He went into the hall and picked up the phone. Maybe it was Uncle Albert. . . .

"Hello?"

"Fenn? I'm calling for Lou Fezz. You know what it's about. Lou don't like to carry stuff on the books. He wants the five grand and he wants it by Friday." the voice was level and had the exact amount of quiet menace in it that was intended.

"F-friday. . . . That's only four days away. . . ."

"Lou can count. Friday. The whole five grand."

Dexter opened his mouth, not knowing what he was going to say. But it was unnecessary, for the phone at the opposite end of the circuit clicked and then the instrument began to buzz in Dexter's ear. The buzzing sounded strangely like that of a rattlesnake.

Uncle Albert was asking for it. Dexter Fenn unconsciously rammed his foot down on the accelerator of the old car and ground his teeth when he thought of his uncle. Why the devil was the old man so completely intractable?

But one way or another, Uncle Albert was the only answer. Dexter felt in his coat pocket for the rectangular box he had brought home yesterday. That was one way. He would try the other way first.

He drove on intently, nervously, the car boring and rattling

through the morning, through neighborhoods that gred steadily more opulent in appearance, until he arrived at last before the great stone pillars that stood at each side of the entrance of Albert Fenn's driveway.

Dexter got out and strode with forced confidence up the side steps and punched the bell button. While he waited, he went over in his mind the attitude he would present to his uncle. It would have to be the proper blend of contriteness and desperation. He would also have to throw Nell in for good measure. Uncle Albert had always liked Nell.

The heavy door swung inward, the musty smell of the old house wafted out on a wave of moist heat. Jason, Uncle Albert's servant, stood there, as bent and as aged as his employer

"Morning, Mr. Dexter."

Dexter stepped gratefully into the heated hallway, took the scarf from around his neck, and handed it to Jason.

"Is Uncle up?"

"Yessir. He's in the library. Here, let me take your coat."

Dexter deftly transferred the oblong box from the overcoat pocket to the inside pocket of the tweed sports jacket Nell had given him for his last birthday. Jason took the coat and scarf and disappeared. Dexter walked down the dark, carpeted hallway and stopped before a door. He stood there a moment, swallowed, touched his tie nervously, and knocked.

"Come in," said a firm voice.

Albert Fenn was seated in a deep, high-backed chair before a small grate fire. He looked up from the book in his lap, a scowl on the age-lined face, then immediately raised his left arm and consulted his watch.

"What the devil are you doing here this time of day! How do you expect to hang onto that job at the real estate company if you don't go to work?"

"I'm not with the real estate company, Uncle Albert. I'm with a surgical supply house. Emery Surgical Su-"

"Yes, yes," said the old man testily. "I remember calling Charlie Emery myself about it. Well, how the devil do you expect to hang onto *that* job if you don't go to work? Do you loaf like this every morning?"

"I tried to call you yesterday, Uncle Albert. It's—it's important. I've got to talk to you!"

Albert Fenn laid his book aside and picked up a bottle from the low table at his side. With a steady hand he poured a small amount from it into a brandy snifter. He swirled it slowly in his hands, then looked up at his nephew. "You need

money, is that it? Dexter, have you ever thought how many people there are in this world—in this very *city*—who live off the money they make?"

"It's not just for my sake, Uncle." He quickly pulled a chair before his uncle and sat down. "It's for Nell."

"*Bosh!* Don't tell me Nell has gotten into trouble! That girl's the best thing that ever happened to you. And you're probably the worst thing that ever happened to her. She doesn't drink and gamble, Dexter, and you do both. To excess."

Dexter looked longingly at the bottle of brandy.

"Alright, help yourself," Albert Fenn said.

Dexter rose quickly and poured brandy into a glass. He took a grateful swallow. Someday, when Uncle Albert was gone, Dexter could afford fine brandy such as this.

"I'm in trouble, Uncle. You've guessed that much. This time I'm in bad trouble. I have to come up with . . . five thousand dollars by Friday—"

"*Five thousand!*" exploded the old man.

Dexter nodded dully.

"And if you don't come up with the money, then what?"

Dexter shrugged, trying not to think too hard on this. "They get their money, or they get their pound of flesh." Immediately, he wished he had not closen that particular phrase.

"Gambling again," said the old man. "And over your head as usual. Well, my boy, you've come to the wrong place this time! You're not getting another dime from me! It might even do you some good to have these hoodlums slap you around a bit. Yes, I think it might do you a great deal of good!"

"Uncle Albert! Think of Nell! Suppose they—"

"Nell doesn't owe them the money. These men, I'm sure, are neither fools nor idiots. They will extract their pound or two of flesh from the man who owes it."

He finished his brandy, picked up his book, and said, "Good morning, Dexter."

"*Uncle—*"

"I said, good *morning*," the old man repeated firmly.

He meant it, Dexter knew that. No argument on earth would sway that ironclad will now. Dexter got slowly to his feet.

His uncle picked up the brandy bottle, looked at it against the light from the window. "On your way out tell Jason to bring me another bottle."

Dexter went to the door, opened it, stepped into the hallway, and soundlessly closed the door

behind him. He lifted his hand and felt the hardness of the small box in his inside pocket. The other way hadn't worked. It would now have to be this way.

He moved quickly down the hallway, pausing at the cellar door. The opportunity was better than he had anticipated, what with Uncle Albert asking him to have Jason bring another bottle. Uncle would simply think Dexter was trying to ingratiate himself if he brought the bottle back instead of having Jason do it.

He opened the door, switched on the light, and descended the stairs. The small wine cellar lay to his right and he moved between the two racks. The brandy was on the middle rack, two bottles of Napoleon remaining. Uncle Albert, Dexter knew, consumed almost one bottle a day. Quickly, he reached into his pocket, took out the small oblong box, and opened it. A glass syringe lay inside. Dexter hastily prepared it with a long needle, removed a small bottle from his pocket, and drew off a minute amount of the liquid in the bottle. He glanced over his shoulder, making certain Jason had not heard him and was not coming down the stairs. There was only silence and the occasional creaking of the old house.

Dexter lifted one of the bottles, placed the needle against the cork, and pressured it in. Once through the cork, he ejected the fluid from the syringe, then placed the syringe back into the box and the box into his pocket. He took out his handkerchief, wiped his brow, then picked up the second bottle of brandy and made his way back up the stairs and to his Uncle Albert.

Dexter was back at his job before ten o'clock that morning. He had disposed of the small bottle as he passed over a bridge, and after having cleansed the syringe very carefully, replaced it in stock. It was a matter of time now, a matter of very little time.

Uncle Albert's death would immediately establish Dexter's credit. He would be safe from Lou Fezz's ire awaiting the settling of Albert Fen's estate.

And there would be little likelihood that the death of a man of Uncle Albert's age and habits would be questioned. The poison would act rapidly, causing the old gentleman not too much discomfort, and it would appear that another octogenarian had passed quietly away while reading and sipping on his daily bottle of brandy.

Even if something were suspected (and Dexter was now positive nothing would be) there

would be no way to tie it to Dexter Fenn. Suspicion, yes. Proof? No.

In a way, he hated to do it. He was not a killer, not in the classic sense of the term. He was only a killer of necessity. Yes, that was it. It was a matter of survival! Uncle Albert had it within his power to prevent this ever happening. In a very real sense, Uncle Albert had been asking for this.

The day dragged by with infinite slowness for Dexter Fenn. Oftentimes, the old man finished a bottle of brandy before evening, and started on another. That being the case, the end could come this very day. Each ring of the office telephone was enough to freeze Dexter Fenn to his seat.

But no call came, and at five-thirty he made his way out of the office, to his car, and through the interminable afternoon traffic home.

Nell, as usual, greeted him smilingly at the door. As she helped him with his coat he remembered what Uncle Albert had said about her. Uncle had been fond of Nell from the start, and he would go to great lengths to save her hurt. Apparently, the seriousness of this present predicament had not soaked in completely on the old man.

"Hard day at the office, dear?"

"What? Oh . . . yes, pretty rugged." He idly watched his wife hang his coat neatly in the closet, then he picked up the newspaper from the hall table, loosened his tie and went into the livingroom to plop down in his favorite chair.

All this will be changed soon, he thought.

"Here," Nell said, appearing at his side. "This will relax you."

He took the brandy glass from her and gratefully let the fluid glide down his throat.

"Want another?"

He nodded and she brought the bottle and refilled his glass. He drank a long sip of the brandy, touched his tongue quickly to his lips. "Say, this is good!"

"It ought to be!" his wife said. "Uncle Albert had Jason bring it over for you this afternoon. He felt badly about being so harsh with you this morning, Jason said. And to make it up, he sent this over. Jason said it was the last of the Napoleon. Now, you see, everything does work out alright!"

Dexter was no longer listening to his wife. He was only acutely aware of the feeling that had begun to burst inside him like a huge, fiery Roman candle. . . .

(Continued from other side)

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